# MRS. MORSE'S GIRLS.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PZ7 Copyright No.

Shelf P28 Mr

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Mrs. Morse's Girls. Page 277.

# MRS. MORSE'S GIRLS.

BY

MINNIE E. KENNEY.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS,
COPYRIGHT
SEP 15 1887
CITY 20377-S
OF WASHINGTON

*AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,*
150 NASSAU STREET, NEW YORK.

PZ7
.P28
Mr

COPYRIGHT, 1887,
BY AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

12-34910

# CONTENTS


CHAPTER I.

Making Acquaintance ---------- 7

CHAPTER II.

Lois at Home ---------- 19

CHAPTER III.

Home Life ---------- 28

CHAPTER IV.

Nora ---------- 40

CHAPTER V.

Bertie's New Friend ---------- 48

CHAPTER VI.

Bertie's Good Times ---------- 57

CHAPTER VII.

The First Prayer-Meeting ---------- 64

CHAPTER VIII.

Visits ---------- 72

CHAPTER IX.

Bertie Goes Home ---------- 79

CHAPTER X.

Estrangement ---------- 85

CHAPTER XI.

"He shall carry the Lambs in his Bosom" ---------- 96

CHAPTER XII.

Comfort ---------- 103

CHAPTER XIII.

The Funeral ---------- 110

CHAPTER XIV.

The Invitations ---------- 121

CHAPTER XV.

The Tea-Party ---------- 129

CHAPTER XVI.

Questions ---------- 136

CHAPTER XVII.

Unrest ---------- 143

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mattie's Conflict ---------- 151

CHAPTER XIX.

Peace ---------- 160

CHAPTER XX.

Nina's Decision ---------- 166

CHAPTER XXI.

Opposition ---------- 174

CHAPTER XXII.

Keeping the Faith ---------- 183

CHAPTER XXIII.

Help ---------- 192

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Glad Discovery ---------- 200

CHAPTER XXV.

The Communion Season ---------- 207

CHAPTER XXVI.

Mattie's Victory ---------- 214

CHAPTER XXVII.

Influence for Good ---------- 221

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Etta's Desire ---------- 228

CHAPTER XXIX.

A First Step ---------- 238

## CHAPTER XXX.

Coming Trials ---------- 248

## CHAPTER XXXI.

A Hard Lesson ---------- 256

## CHAPTER XXXII.

Joy after Sorrow ---------- 266

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

All Safe at Last ---------- 274

# MRS. MORSE'S GIRLS.

## CHAPTER I.

### MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

"THERE are three classes at present unprovided for, and I should be very glad to have you decide for yourself which class needs you most; I will not say which class you would find most agreeable."

The sweet-faced woman standing beside the superintendent's desk smiled. "No; I should not like to make the decision a matter of personal pleasure," she answered thoughtfully. "Will you point out the classes to me, if you please? and then I can tell better where I can be the most helpful."

"The first is the young men's Bible-class," began Mr. Pearsall. "Our former pastor took charge of it, and we were in hopes that Mr. Morse would take his place. Perhaps you know whether

he would be willing to add another burden to his Sunday duties."

"I know that he intends to take part in the Sunday-school work," answered Mrs. Morse, "but it is his wish not to become the regular teacher of any class; he prefers, instead, to supply those classes whose teachers may be unexpectedly called away and neglect to procure a substitute. In this way he has a chance to become better acquainted with all the young people, and has an opportunity to speak to each one personally, which he could not have if he devoted himself to a single class."

"I am very glad to hear that we may expect his assistance," said Mr. Pearsall cordially. "Although I must confess I had greatly hoped that he would take these young men in charge, yet I can see that his plan is the better one."

"Have you any other teacher in view?" asked Mrs. Morse.

"Well, I have often thought that Dr. Foster would make an excellent teacher for young men," responded Mr. Pearsall. "He is a Christian, leading a most consistent and upright life, and has the power of attracting and interesting young people in a high degree. Unfortunately I cannot succeed in interesting him in Sunday-school work. He approves of it and gives it his cordial support

in other ways, but I have heretofore been unsuccessful in my efforts to secure his services as a teacher. He partially promised, however, that if neither Mr. Morse nor yourself took charge of this class he would reconsider his determination."

"Then I shall certainly give him an opportunity to do so by considering that class as provided for," answered Mrs. Morse. "Now the other classes."

"These little girls sitting near the organ are without a teacher," went on Mr. Pearsall. "I think they will require far less care than the other class which I will point out to you. Those six young girls sitting near the door have not had a regular teacher for some weeks now. In many respects they are not an undesirable class. They are old enough to be quiet and orderly, and I think most of them are intelligent girls who enjoy study; but the trouble is there are such marked divisions in the class that it constitutes a very inharmonious whole. The last teacher that had them in charge did not appear to have the happy faculty of uniting them, and they do not seem to have a single point of interest in common. I have thought it would be better to divide the class in some way, but have not been able to see my way clear to do so without creating bad feeling. If

you notice the girls you will see the necessity there is for avoiding anything that looks like partiality."

It was very easy even for a stranger to notice the divisions in this class. It was composed of young girls ranging in age from fourteen to sixteen years, who made three distinct groups. Two of the girls were richly dressed, and showed their consciousness of their superiority over their classmates in this respect by sitting closely together at some distance from the others. The three who next attracted Mrs. Morse's attention were girls whose dress, though showy with bright ribbons and cotton lace, lacked all the evidences of good taste and refinement which were visible in the quiet richness of the other two girls. They plainly showed their resentment at being slighted by ignoring the rest of the class and engaging in animated conversation among themselves, with their heads close together lest they should be overheard.

One member of the class seemed entirely alone, and Mrs. Morse could not mentally decide whether her isolation was the result of choice or accident. She wore a hard, cynical expression that did not look natural upon such a young face, and she seemed wholly to ignore the presence of her classmates. Her dress, though well worn to the point

of shabbiness, was neat and tasteful, and she was without ornament of any kind, a fact that seemed to give her a certain individuality, as her poorer companions were loaded with bangles, paste diamonds, and heavy, glittering ear-rings, and the more fortunate girls wore as much jewelry as good taste would permit, if indeed they did not overstep the boundary-line.

It was a class that a conscientious teacher might well shrink from taking in charge. It would be no easy task to assimilate such conflicting elements and bring them into Christian unity. The somewhat bold and reckless expression on the faces of three of the girls warned Mrs. Morse that it would need great tact and strong influence to develop the womanliness of their natures, while love would be needed to change the hard, bitter look that rested on the face of the one who held herself aloof from the others.

The doll-like prettiness of one of the other two faces and the haughty expression of its companion were not altogether encouraging; and as Mrs. Morse studied the class in silence for a few moments Mr. Pearsall was half fearful that she would shrink from undertaking a task that seemed so difficult.

It was not of the difficulties that Mrs. Morse was thinking, for she would not seek her own

comfort and ease when work for the Master lay in her path, but she wondered whether some one else would not be better fitted for the position.

"Had you not some teacher in view for this class?" she asked.

Mr. Pearsall shook his head decidedly. "No; I do not know of any one who is fitted for the difficulties that this special class presents; and, moreover, no one is willing to take it in its present condition. There has been so much complaint about the ill-feeling in the class that teachers shrink from teaching it even for a single Sunday. It will be hard work, I know, Mrs. Morse, and I am not among those who believe that a minister's wife should bear the heaviest burdens in the church and Sunday-school, so I will not urge it upon you. Nevertheless I will say that if you are willing to take it I shall feel relieved from a heavy responsibility, for I had begun to feel that it was a hopeless task to provide them with a teacher."

"Then I will take the class for a time and see how I succeed," answered Mrs. Morse. "If I find that I cannot bring about a better feeling among the girls, I will resign it, in the hope that some one else may be better fitted for the task; but I will do my best before I give up."

"If you cannot manage them, I am sure no one

else can, and I shall divide the class," answered Mr. Pearsall. "Shall I introduce you to your new charges at once?"

"If you please." And Mrs. Morse followed the superintendent down the aisle, a swift-winged prayer for wisdom and strength arising from the depths of her heart.

The new minister's wife had been an object of curious scrutiny, and the three classes who were without a teacher studied her expectantly, wondering upon which she would decide.

The little girls looked wistfully at her as her glance rested kindly upon them for a moment, and whispered to each other their childish hopes that she would be their new teacher; and they were wofully disappointed when they saw her going towards the class of older girls.

"I wonder if she's going to take our class," whispered Nina to Florence. "I wish she would; she's so pleasant-looking."

"She isn't a bit stylish," commented Florence, whose first impulse was to measure Mrs. Morse by her standard of style. "Still she is pleasant-looking, as you say, Nina, and I'm sick of having a different teacher every Sunday. I hate this class, anyhow. I do wish Mr. Pearsall would put you and me into the young ladies' Bible-class. I'm going to ask him next year. I

would now, only I'm afraid he will say that we are n't old enough."

"Do you think she's going to be our teacher?" asked Mattie, watching the kindly face eagerly.

"Do n't care if she is," said Nora. "She'll be like all the rest. She wont take no notice of us, but just make a fuss over those stuck-up things that think they're too good to sit with us. We're just as good as they are, any day, if they do put on such airs."

"They think they're somebody great," chimed in Etta, who had caught Florence's remark about the class.

Only Lois Cramer sat with a face of stolid indifference. "It does n't make any difference to me," she said to herself bitterly; "she wont be nice to me; nobody ever is. I would n't come to Sunday-school if mother did n't feel so bad when I stay away. Florence and Nina wont notice me because I'm not dressed like a wax-doll, though I'm just as nice as they are, and I'd rather be all by myself than speak to these common things;" and the glance of contempt she cast at Mattie, Nora, and Etta was not hard to interpret.

"Well, young ladies, I have brought you a new teacher whom I am sure you will all welcome," said Mr. Pearsall pleasantly as he paused

before the class. "This is Mrs. Morse, and I will leave her to make your acquaintance at leisure, as it is time for school to open now."

Before Mrs. Morse had time to do more than take her seat and smile brightly at the members of her new class the bell rang for silence and the opening hymn was given out.

It was the beautiful consecration hymn,

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;"

and as Mrs. Morse looked at the bright, indifferent faces of "her girls," as she already termed them, she knew that the words had no response in their hearts, they were sung so lightly and carelessly.

When the opening exercises were concluded, Mrs. Morse turned to Nina with a pleasant smile. "I shall have to ask you to give me a special introduction to each member of the class, as Mr. Pearsall did not have time to do so. Will you begin with yourself and give me the names, so that I can put them down in my class-book?"

"I am Nina Maynard," began Nina, pleased that she had won the first notice from the new teacher, "and this is my friend Florence Estabrook. Those three are Mattie Brown, Etta Smith, and—"

"Wait a moment," interrupted Mrs. Morse,

as Nina was volubly rattling off the names. "I am afraid I shall not know to whom the names belong if you do not give me more time between each introduction. This is Mattie Brown, is it?" and she smiled at Mattie as she answered.

"And your name?" Mrs. Morse went on when she had written Mattie's name.

Her eyes rested kindly on Etta, and the angry flush that had risen to the young girl's cheek when Nina had so hastily rattled off her name, subsided when she saw that Mrs. Morse's manner was just as kind to her as to Nina.

Nora Davis' name came next and then Mrs. Morse turned to Lois.

If there was one thing that Lois resented and grieved over more than another in the circumstances which she considered the misfortunes of her lot, it was her name. Ugly and stiff she called it, since it was not capable of the endearing diminutives of other names. She particularly disliked telling a stranger her name, and when she answered Mrs. Morse's inquiry her manner grew even more repellant and sullen.

"Lois Cramer," she said frigidly, with no response to the friendly glance of her new teacher.

"That is my favorite name," said Mrs. Morse as she wrote it in the class-book. "I think it is a beautiful name in itself, and then it was the

name of a very dear friend besides, and her memory lends it very sweet associations."

For a fleeting instant the sullen look vanished, but it returned before Mrs. Morse had time to note the change of expression.

It was the first time any one had ever admired the quaint, sweet name, and Lois felt a natural girlish pleasure at Mrs. Morse's openly expressed admiration.

"What a queer name!" or "How old-fashioned and ugly!" were the comments she had heard from those who were frank enough to express their opinion, and she had grown sensitive on the subject.

Mrs. Morse had no idea how gratefully her approbation fell upon Lois' ears, as she gave no sign of her gratification, and the teacher was conscious only of a feeling of rebuff when her friendliness met with no response.

When Mrs. Morse opened her Bible and began to teach the lesson for the day, she was surprised to find that but one of the girls knew where it was or had any idea of the subject. Lois answered her question reluctantly, seemingly annoyed at her own knowledge; and the others frankly confessed that they never looked at the lesson until they came to Sunday-school.

Mrs. Morse soon learned that they had never

been in the habit of thoroughly studying the lesson or, in fact, of taking any interest in it further than merely reading it over in the class and answering a few questions upon the text. They seemed quite ignorant of Bible history, and evidently preferred laughing and talking among themselves to paying any heed to the lesson.

Mrs. Morse had the rare gift which so many teachers lack. She possessed the power of interesting her scholars almost against their inclinations, and as Mr. Pearsall from his desk saw the bright, eager faces turned towards their new teacher, he felt assured of her final success.

## CHAPTER II.

### LOIS AT HOME.

WHEN the superintendent's bell announced the close of the time allotted to the study of the lesson, Mrs. Morse breathed a little sigh of satisfaction.

She had made considerable progress in her new undertaking. She had won the attention of her class and felt tolerably sure that they had been interested, and to insure their study during the week she had allotted to each one some subject to prepare.

She had won impulsive Nina's heart too, for at the close of the lesson the little gloved hand had been slipped into her own with a loving pressure.

Florence was neither as impulsive nor as demonstrative as her friend and rather prided herself upon the length of time she could withhold her friendship, so Mrs. Morse was not so sure of having won her.

Mattie was pleased by having the new teacher share her hymnal during the singing, and her two friends were also gratified, for they inferred

from this simple act that Mrs. Morse would not exhibit the preference they had been accustomed to see other teachers show for Nina and Florence.

Lois alone had held herself aloof. She had been interested in the lesson in spite of herself, by the clear explanations, but she had done her best to conceal the fact. Mrs. Morse sought in vain to brighten the unhappy expression upon her face, but her kindliest efforts were met and repelled by the girl's persistent coldness.

The instant that school was dismissed, Lois, with a cool "Good afternoon," hastily took her departure, while the others lingered about their new teacher.

"I'm so glad you're going to be our teacher," said Mattie, with a defiant glance at Nina and Florence. "We're going to have a real good lesson next Sunday."

"What a fuss Mattie is making over her!" thought Lois disdainfully, glancing back as she passed through the door. "I don't see how she can like to have those horrid girls near her, but she seems to think they're just as good as any one. She wont get me making a fuss over her very soon, anyhow."

Lois walked on rapidly, her swift feet carrying her past those who had been before her in leaving

the Sunday-school, but were slowly sauntering homeward.

After she had gone a few squares along the avenue she turned into a quiet street and walked rapidly along it until she came to a tall brick apartment house. Scarcely noticing the children who were sitting on the steps, she brushed hastily past them and ran up stairs.

The cloud left her face as she opened a door and went into a room, small and plainly furnished, but beautifully neat and homelike, where a child sat in a large chair by the window.

"Sister!" he cried joyfully, and as Lois stooped over him and gave him a tender kiss he clung to her neck lovingly.

"Are you too tired to hold me a little bit?" he asked pleadingly. "My back hurts so this afternoon."

Such a poor little misshapen figure it was that Lois lifted gently in her arms—drawn out of all shape, with a protruding lump between the shoulders, and useless, wasted limbs.

A very heavy burden of suffering and deformity it seemed for a little child to bear, and you would have turned away from the sight with swift tears of pity, unless you had caught a glimpse of the face first.

Soft yellow hair floated down and made a

beautiful veil over the poor little misshapen shoulders, the childish face was very perfect in contour and coloring, although suffering and disease had made the skin almost transparent, and the great blue eyes had an unchildlike look of patiently endured pain and wistful entreaty.

Lois laid aside her hat, and with little Bertie nestled in her arms sat down in the large rocking-chair by the window and gently rocked to and fro.

Her face was so wholly changed by the love that illumined it as she laid her cheek upon the soft hair that Mrs. Morse would scarcely have recognized her could she have seen her now. All the moodiness was gone from her expression and the hardness from her tone as she talked to the little brother whom she loved with an affection that amounted to idolatry.

"Do n't you want me to help you, mother?" she asked, as her mother, after listening to their conversation for a while with a pleased look on her face, rose and began to make preparations for their simple meal.

"No, my dear. There is n't much to do, and I would rather have you hold Bertie; he has been waiting for you so long."

"Tell me what you did at Sunday-school," Bertie said at last.

"Oh, we sang, and we studied lessons, and

we sang again," said Lois playfully. "Our class has got a new teacher too, Bertie. I guess you 'd like her," she added as she remembered how kind and tender the face of the new teacher could be, and she imagined how Mrs. Morse would look at Bertie if she could see him.

"Sister, I wish you would take me to Sunday-school once more," pleaded Bertie; but a hard look came into Lois' face again as she heard his entreaty, and the chair swung vigorously back and forth.

Once she had taken Bertie with her, thinking it would brighten the lonely child's life to go to Sunday-school and hear the singing and listen to the lesson.

Lois was far more sensitive about Bertie's deformity than the child was himself, and shrank painfully from the thought of letting strangers see him and pity him; but he had begged so eagerly to go that she resolved to gratify him at any cost.

She wrapped him in a soft white shawl, trying to hide his misshapen figure as much as possible, and took the light form in her arms. No one seemed to notice him as she passed along the street, and she began to hope that the shawl effectually hid him.

She seated herself in her usual place at Sun-

day-school, and loosened the shawl a little that Bertie might not be too warm.

The girls had not noticed her at first, but when she made a movement to unfasten the shawl they looked around and saw Bertie upon her lap. They were kind-hearted, and would not for the world have intentionally grieved either the child or his sister, but they were thoughtless, as girls often are, and Lois was very sensitive.

"Oh, my! a' n't his back awful?" exclaimed Mattie unthinkingly; and before Lois could flash an angry glance at her Etta had made a similar exclamation.

With a pitiful little cry Bertie turned towards his sister and buried his face in her neck, clinging tightly to her. Lois glanced about her as she put her arms protectingly around the child, with a look of pain and anger on her face, and just then she saw a little shiver run through the young lady who was teaching the class that day as she looked at Bertie.

That was enough for Lois, and springing to her feet, her face pale with the intensity of her anger, she rushed out of the room, holding Bertie so tightly to her that the child cried out with pain before she realized what she was doing.

If she had only understood the real feelings of both the girls and their teacher she would have

been saved much suffering. The girls had meant to show their sympathy, though they had expressed themselves with rough candor; and as for their teacher, she had no thought of appearing shocked at the child's misshapen form.

But Lois never stopped to think that anything but horror and disgust could have been expressed by the young lady's movement; and the remembrance of the girls' speeches roused her anger to white heat. Never, never should her little brother be exposed to the unkindness of strangers again, she protested, and her passion of anger and grief almost frightened her mother.

Bertie had not asked again to go to Sunday-school for a long time, but more than a year had elapsed since then, and he had forgotten how frightened he had been at being the object of so much observation and so many remarks.

When he asked Lois to take him with her again the old anger blazed up at the remembrance of the former time when she had yielded to his request.

"No, Bertie," she said in more decided tones than she had ever used to him before; "no; you must n't go to Sunday-school. You do n't want to go, darling," she went on caressingly as a grieved look came in his face. "Do n't you remember those horrid girls and how rude they

were? Sister 'll sing all the pretty hymns to you after supper, and tell you pretty Bible stories, and that will be a great deal nicer."

Presently tea was ready and Lois carried Bertie to the table, attending to all his wants with a tenderness and thoughtfulness that were beyond her years.

His appetite was often capricious, and to-night he did not seem hungry for the plain fare; so Lois spread his bread with the jelly that was his special treat, and, cutting it into tiny mouthfuls, beguiled him into eating by pretending that the little pieces of bread were soldiers, who must be captured and put into his mouth for a fort.

After tea she put him back into the depths of the easy-chair and helped her mother clear away the remains of the supper and wash the dishes; then opening a little old-fashioned piano, she sang the child's favorite hymns, the tinkling accompaniment, that sounded like the tones of an antiquated spinnet, making her fresh young voice seem all the sweeter and clearer.

None of her classmates ever guessed what a voice Lois had, for she would not sing in Sunday-school, she cherished such bitter, resentful feelings against the girls; but by her voice she hoped to earn many a comfort for Bertie before many years had passed.

Four years before her father had died suddenly, leaving his wife and children dependent upon a scanty income that scarcely supplied their simplest needs even by dint of the severest economy; and Lois looked forward eagerly to the time when she could earn enough to gratify Bertie's wishes as well as brighten her mother's careworn look.

She was studying to fit herself for a teacher, and every day she rejoiced that the realization of her hopes was so much nearer at hand.

## CHAPTER III.

### HOME LIFE.

NINA left Sunday-school in a very enthusiastic mood, and she was quite disappointed when she failed in receiving any sympathy from Florence.

"I think Mrs. Morse is just perfectly lovely!" she exclaimed rapturously.

"I have heard you say that about people before the first time you met them, and then you have entirely changed your mind on a little longer acquaintance," answered Florence calmly.

Nina flushed with annoyance, but she would not yield her point. "Well, Mrs. Morse is different. I am sure I shall like her better every day. Don't you think she's lovely, Florence?"

"I can't say that I do," answered Florence; then, as Nina uttered an exclamation of surprise, she added, "You must remember that I am not given to taking such violent fancies as you do, Nina. Mrs. Morse certainly seems to be very agreeable, but I shall not make up my mind until I have known her long enough to form an opinion deliberately."

Poor little Nina felt very ignorant and inex-

perienced by the side of the friend she considered so much wiser than herself.

Florence had won a reputation among her girl friends for great wisdom merely because she affected great deliberation in pronouncing judgment, and she never risked this reputation by indulging in any sudden impulse, which indeed she rarely felt.

It was strange that so strong a friendship could exist between two so utterly dissimilar in their dispositions and tastes. Nina loved Florence with all the warmth of her impulsive nature, never expecting much return for her admiration and affection; and Florence calmly accepted her friend's devotion as a matter of course and a natural tribute to her superior talents.

Sometimes Florence's deliberation tried Nina's patience not a little, as it did this afternoon; but generally she considered all that her friend did and said as the standard by which to measure all others. She did not say anything further about her new teacher, finding that she could expect no sympathy from Florence, and she was not altogether sorry when she reached her own door a few moments later and bade Florence good-by.

Nina was a petted only daughter, and whatever concerned her happiness was of the deepest interest to her parents, so she had willing audi-

tors at the tea-table when she gave them an enthusiastic account of her new teacher.

"I don't suppose any one would call her exactly pretty," she said, "but there's something about her face that makes me like to look at her. Then her eyes are so kind and loving, yet they look as if they could see right through you, too. She makes the lesson so interesting, somehow. I never supposed there was anything to study in it, but there's ever so much. I've got a lot of references to look up for next time, and I don't mean to forget it."

"I'm glad you like your new teacher so much," said her father with a pleased smile. "You have complained so much about the class that I had thought of taking you away."

"Well, it is a horrid class," said Nina. "Florence and I are the only nice girls in it. Lois Cramer isn't as common as the others, but she's so surly and disagreeable that I never speak to her if I can help it. Still, I don't mind the girls now we've got such a nice teacher, for I never notice them, anyway; and though of course it's disagreeable to have such girls in the class, I wouldn't leave on their account now."

"I think it's very strange that Mr. Pearsall should put such girls in a class with you and Florence," said her mother. "He ought not to

expect you to mix with them, and I 'm glad you do n't notice them. Perhaps they will leave of their own accord when they find that they are not wanted."

"I might have had some hopes of that before Mrs. Morse took the class," said Nina, "but I do n't believe they will now, for I must say that on that one point they seem to agree with me in liking her."

"I should n't think she would want to have anything to do with them," said the mother, glancing proudly at the pretty face crowned with masses of fluffy golden hair. "It would be so much better if she had a class of nice, refined girls. It 's a waste of time to try to benefit such girls as those three factory hands, or whatever they are, for all their thoughts are on dress, and frightful taste they have too. The combination of colors on that Smith girl's hat made me actually shudder. She was sitting in one of those side pews where I could not help seeing her every time I raised my eyes."

Any one who had observed the dresses of the two girls in the afternoon would have thought that Nina's dress had cost more thought as well as more money than Etta's, but this did not occur to Mrs. Maynard. It was only in Nina's poorer classmates that she considered an undue

attention to dress reprehensible, and it was really their lack of taste that she regarded as their chief offence.

"You would shudder all the time, mamma, if you sat beside them in Sunday-school," laughed Nina as she passed her cup to be refilled with the fragrant tea, and she proceeded to give an amusing account of Etta's jewelry and her pride in it.

If Mrs. Morse could have heard the conversation she might well have doubted whether she could ever carry out the task she had determined upon, of bringing these inharmonious elements in her class into unity.

In the one short hour she had spent with these girls she had gained a tolerably good idea of the diversity of their interests and of the difficulty in finding one common ground upon which they could all meet.

Her first task must be to win their hearts, and then by means of this human love she could lead them to their Saviour. With such an object before her, she trusted that by patience and tact she should win the affections of even the perverse Lois. Impulsive Nina and frank, outspoken Mattie had already responded to her interest in them; and as she recalled the loving pressure of Nina's hand and Mattie's expressed pleasure, she felt

that she had made a good beginning in her new work.

As Mattie walked homeward with Etta, who lived in the same street, the conversation naturally turned upon their new teacher. Mattie was an affectionate, warm-hearted girl, and Mrs. Morse's kindly manner had completely won her heart. Her previous teacher had unfortunately shown a marked preference for Florence and Nina, and Mattie had strongly resented it; while her experience with the other teachers who had taken charge of the class temporarily had confirmed her in the idea that no teacher would take any interest in her or in her two friends, whose cause she made her own.

Sensitive though she was to slights, real or fancied, she could not detect the slightest partiality in Mrs. Morse's manner, and the smile with which she returned Nina's hand-clasp had not been more kindly than the pleased expression with which she had listened to Mattie's impulsive approval of her new teacher.

"I was beginning to think I would quit going to Sunday-school," Etta remarked; "but I believe I 'm going to like Mrs. Morse better than I ever liked any one."

"Well, I know I do," said Mattie emphatically. "She was just every bit as nice to us as

she was to those two stuck-up things, and I was ashamed of the way Lois Cramer acted to her when she was so pleasant. She's a cross, ugly thing, anyway, and I don't believe she's ever civil to any one. I mean to study real hard this week and show Mrs. Morse that I can learn as well as anybody, even if I could n't answer a single question to-day."

"Did n't she make the lesson interesting!" asked Etta. "I never expected any one could possibly make it so much like a story. Well, here I am at home already. Can't you come in a little while?"

"No, I must hurry home, for it's my night for getting supper," answered Mattie.

So Etta bade her friend good-by reluctantly, and lingered on the doorstep for a few moments to chat with a neighbor who had brought her baby out for a little fresh air.

At last she left the outdoor sunshine and went slowly up the steep flights of stairs that must be ascended before she could reach the two rooms she called home. Not a very inviting home, for there was nothing cosey or homelike in its appearance, although it was scrupulously clean and the elderly woman who sat by the window reading was the very impersonation of neatness.

She looked up, with an impatient expression upon her sharp-featured face, as Etta entered.

"So you've got home at last!" was her salutation. "Here I've been waiting half an hour or more to go out while you've been dawdling along home. Now you take off your things and get the kettle on. I'll be back by the time supper's ready;" and she went out, closing the door after her with an energy that showed her annoyance.

A sullen look clouded Etta's bright face. "She's bound to find something to scold about, of course," she murmured angrily. "I can't have a minute to myself Sundays, or week-days either, for the matter of that. If I say a word back to her, then she begins to tell me all she's done for me; and I s'pose she *has* been good to me, though I'd rather have been brought up in an orphan asylum than have it thrown at me every time I don't please her."

Etta's father and mother had died within a few short weeks of each other when she was but a little over a year old; and very reluctantly her father's maiden sister had assumed the responsibility of caring for the little orphan.

She was not fond of children and had but a slender stock of patience to expend upon them, and she regarded it as a great trial that she should

be obliged to bring a child into the quiet, orderly room she called home and thus add to her expenses. Only a feeling of family pride had influenced her to offer to take Etta. She felt as if it would be a disgrace to the family to have her niece placed in an orphan asylum, and for this sole reason she had opened her home to her.

In some ways she had cared for the child faithfully, and it never entered her mind that she had not done her whole duty to the motherless little one. Etta had always been comfortably, if plainly, clad, and she had never wanted for an abundance of plain, wholesome food; but there her aunt's care had ceased.

Martha Smith was not an affectionate or demonstrative woman, and even if her heart had warmed towards the child, she would probably not have given any outward sign of her affection. Looking upon her only as an unwelcome encumbrance, she treated her with a coldness that was as hard to bear as actual unkindness for a girl of Etta's impulsive, loving nature.

Almost from babyhood she keenly felt her unwelcome dependence upon her aunt, and she looked eagerly forward to earning her own living. When she was only eight years old she had left school to take a position as cash-girl in the large dry-goods store in which she was now a sales-

woman; and the happiest part of her life had been since she could feel that she was paying her own way at home and could spend all her earnings over the amount of her board on dress and ornaments.

Considering her loveless life, with so brief a space of childhood, it was not to be wondered at that her face wore a rather fretful and unhappy expression.

In the depths of her heart lurked a passionate longing for love, and though she never spoke of this feeling, she envied Mattie Brown the large family of little brothers and sisters who clung about their good-natured elder sister as soon as she entered the house, and whose innumerable needs were always draining Mattie's purse.

Etta contrasted her home with her friend's bitterly. The perfect neatness of the rooms she shared with her aunt was missing at Mattie's, for disorder and untidiness were rampant where there were so many little ones "and only one pair of hands to do everything with," as the mother complained sometimes.

Mrs. Brown could ill afford to spare her eldest daughter's help, and yet her weekly wages were a great assistance to the slender means of the family; so the mother struggled on as best she might, knowing that Mattie's willing hands would come to her rescue in the evening.

But Etta forgot to note the disorder; she only thought of the welcome that awaited Mattie in the evenings from all, from the tired father grimy with his work in the coalyard, down to Nan, the wee, toddling baby; and she wondered bitterly why her aunt could not be different and show her some of the love that others had in such abundance.

Once Mattie guessed at her friend's feeling. One evening when Etta had gone home with her she had bidden little Nan hug her; and as Etta felt the soft baby arms clasp tightly about her neck a swift rush of tears filled her eyes, and she buried her face in the plump neck and kept it hidden there till Nan grew restless under the prolonged embrace.

Mattie saw the wet eyes and guessed at the cause, but with unusual tact she did not speak of it, and only did her best to make Etta feel that she had a place in the home circle.

If Mattie had been disposed to look about her for causes of self-pity, she might have found abundant reason to be dissatisfied with her lot in life; but her buoyant, hopeful disposition, abounding in good-nature towards every one with whom she came in contact, made her contented and happy. True, she worked hard and most of her earnings had to go into the general household

fund; but she loved the little ones so dearly that she did not grudge the money that was expended on their necessities. She never contrasted her life with that of young girls outwardly more favored who came into the store to make purchases, apparently as free from care as butterflies. She only looked at the lives of her companions, and in this comparison her own life seemed a very happy one, though Nina and Florence, or even Lois, might have looked rather scornfully upon her home surroundings.

## CHAPTER IV.

### NORA.

NORA DAVIS lived but a few doors from Mattie, and as the two girls were employed in the same store, they usually came and went together. They were fast friends as well as companions, and Nora looked to Mattie as her champion in any trouble she might get into in business or among her companions.

Etta did the same, so Mattie was decidedly the leader of the trio. Mrs. Morse had discerned this fact in a very few minutes' observation, and she knew that in winning Mattie she had won Nora and Etta also.

Perhaps Nora's home was rather above that of her two companions in the matters of comfort and display. Her father was a good mechanic and earned fair wages, which enabled him to make a very comfortable home for his family; and as Nora's stepmother was of an ambitious turn of mind, the little parlor was gorgeous with bright-colored tidies and showy chromos.

Nora's earnings were almost entirely spent upon her wardrobe, for her father insisted that she

should pay no more towards her own support than her stepbrother did towards his expenses; and as he was a mischievous, fun-loving boy, who did not take kindly to labor of any kind, he was far more frequently out of employment than at work. Although Nora often complained of her stepmother's partiality to Tom, still she was very kindly treated as a general thing. It was only when her wishes and Tom's came into collision that she was obliged to give up her own way; and this was rarely the case, for Tom was fond of his stepsister and did not exact much self-denial from her.

As the little family gathered around the supper-table Nora gleefully announced that she had a new Sunday-school teacher, and after enlarging upon Mrs. Morse's pleasant manners and kind face she repeated all that she could remember of the lesson.

Even her father grew interested and laid down the Sunday newspaper, that he was trying to read between the mouthfuls of supper, while he listened.

"I hope you 'll be able to keep her," he said when Nora paused for breath. "Your class has been having such bad luck with your teachers that I would n't be surprised if you did n't have this one long. She must be a smart one to tell

you all that in one lesson. I would n't mind hearing her talk myself."

"Oh, she makes everything just like a story," answered Nora. "She gave us something to study for next Sunday too. We never had a teacher that did that before. Why, I never even thought of looking to see where the lesson was till I got to Sunday-school. I guess I 'm going to like her first-rate too. She do n't seem to like those two dressed-up girls a bit better than the rest of us."

"Goodness knows you 're as good as any one else, as far as dressing goes," said her mother, looking at Nora's showy dress half proudly. "You put nigh every cent you earn on your back, and it all shows for its cost too. In my eyes you look a heap more stylish than that Estabrook girl, if her father is rich. She shows no taste about her clothes; she always wears such dark, quiet things that you might think they did n't cost anything unless you looked at them well." And Mrs. Davis' eyes rested with evident admiration upon Nora's jacket of crimson cotton velvet, with its bright buttons.

"Anyhow, sis, you 're the best-looking girl of the whole crowd," said Tom with a look of pride; and Nora's face grew bright as she listened to the words of praise.

Mrs. Morse's Girls. Page 43.

In the secret depths of her heart she felt that there was something about Florence Estabrook's toilets that she could not hope to approach, no matter how showy her cheap satins and bright velvet might be; and she had enough taste to prefer Florence's rich though quiet costume to her own, although she had not the faintest idea how to produce the same results.

Still she had a great deal of faith in her mother's taste, for was not her parlor far superior to that of any of the neighbors? So Mrs. Davis' assurance that her dresses were far prettier than Florence's comforted her not a little, for she was intensely jealous of her classmate.

After supper, when the dishes were washed and put away, Nora put on her hat and went to Mattie's house, according to her usual custom.

As she reached the door the sound of rattling dishes proved to her that she had been more expeditious than Mattie in clearing away the tea-things and getting ready for their evening walk, so she was not surprised when she entered the room to see Mattie, enveloped in a huge apron, vigorously attacking the great pile of unwashed plates and cups and saucers, with the children clustered so closely about her that their efforts to help retarded rather than aided the completion of the task.

The tired mother swung slowly backward and forward in the big, old-fashioned rocking-chair in which Mattie had forcibly installed her, and as she enjoyed the rare luxury of rest, watched her eldest daughter with evident affection and pride.

"Now, Nan, shall I have to fish you out of the dish-water and put you in the oven to dry?" demanded Mattie with mock severity as she found that the baby had taken advantage of her momentary inattention when she turned to greet Nora and had tried her best to drag herself out of her high chair into the dish-pan.

"I'll hold her. Come here to me, Nan, wont you?" asked Nora; but the baby drooped her head shyly and put her dirty finger in her mouth.

"She'll be all right here if I keep watch of her," said Mattie. "She isn't clean enough for you to take when you have your best dress on, anyhow. You wouldn't think, to look at her, that she's been washed twice to-day. She don't keep clean while I'm dressing her; but I s'pose dirt makes you all the sweeter, don't it, Nan?"

The little one laughed and made unintelligible efforts to answer; then finding Nora's eyes upon her, she hid her face in her fat arms and peeped shyly through them.

"Is Etta coming around?" asked Nora.

"Yes, if she can get off from her aunt. We

got home so late last Sunday night that she said Etta should n't go any more; so maybe she can't beg off. I told her we would stop for her, anyhow."

"Her aunt is awful strict with her," remarked Nora; "I'd hate to have to live with her. A stepmother's bad enough."

"I do n't see why she would n't let the poor girl go for a walk Sunday evening," remarked Mrs. Brown, who had no idea of restraining Mattie in anything she wanted to do. "You 're shut up in the store every day from morning till night, and a little fresh air on Sunday a' n't any more than you need and deserve. There can't any harm come to you when you all go together so."

"There, now I 'm done!" exclaimed Mattie triumphantly as she drew the last knife from the greasy dish-water and wiped it on the questionable-looking towel. Clean towels and an abundance of hot water and soap were unnecessary luxuries in dish-washing according to Mrs. Brown's notions, and as none of the family were fastidious, no one ever offered any objection to her way of doing things.

Mattie unfastened the big apron and tossed it aside, and, going to a small looking-glass that hung on the wall, began to arrange her hair with the comb which depended from a string. The

dark hair that, left to itself, would have fallen in little wavy locks about her forehead, was combed and frizzled with a hot slate-pencil till it resembled the mane of a shaggy Shetland pony.

Just as Mattie was putting on her hat with great care, so as not to disarrange a hair, Etta's steps were heard on the stairs, and in another moment she entered the room, breathless with rapid walking, and threw herself into the nearest chair.

"Such a time as I've had to get to come!" she panted. "I tell you, I had to put my wits to work to get off! I told aunt our new teacher wanted us all to go to church to-night, and so she let me come. I must get back early now or I'll get into an awful scrape. If she mistrusts I haven't been to church, she wont let me off again."

The girls laughed at what they considered a clever ruse, and Mrs. Brown joined them.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Mattie; "we'll all walk along together right past the house, just as if we were on our way to church, and then she wont be suspecting anything; and I'll see that you get home again by a quarter past nine at the latest, Etta; so you need n't worry."

A few moments later the three girls walked decorously along on the side of the street opposite Etta's home, and Aunt Martha, looking from be-

hind her curtains, saw them going in the direction of the church and little suspected that it was part of the plan to deceive her.

It was really from a desire to do her duty to her niece that she had forbidden the Sunday evening walks, which lasted sometimes till as late as half-past ten; and knowing nothing of the young men who accompanied the three girls, she had determined to put a stop to the matter by keeping Etta at home with her in the evenings.

When, however, Ettta had told her that the minister's wife had taken the class of which she was a member, Aunt Martha thought it very probable that she had urged the girls to attend church in the evening; and as Etta evidently liked her, Miss Smith thought her niece's desire to go to church a very natural one.

After the trio were safely out of Aunt Martha's range of vision they turned into another street and were presently joined by three overgrown boys or very young men, and the party walked on together, laughing and talking noisily and merrily.

If Mrs. Morse could have listened to them, she might have been well nigh in despair at the thought of ever producing serious impressions on minds apparently so unimpressible and frivolous.

## CHAPTER V.

### BERTIE'S NEW FRIEND.

A MONTH had passed slowly away, and Mrs. Morse was beginning to hope that she had won for herself a place in the hearts of all her class but two.

Florence still maintained her haughty, indifferent demeanor, and although she was too intelligent a girl not to be interested in the lesson, when Mrs. Morse spared no pains to make it attractive as well as instructive, she concealed her interest as much as possible, and was unapproachable on all other subjects.

Nina's affection for her teacher was no passing fancy, as Florence constantly predicted it would soon become, but her warm heart responded to Mrs. Morse's affectionate interest, and she was eager to prove her love by doing all that she could to please her teacher.

Mattie, Etta, and Nora were the lady's faithful adherents, and spared no efforts to have a perfect lesson that they might win her smile of approval. But Lois still remained as frigid as at first; and

though the look of unhappiness on the young face won Mrs. Morse's tender pity, notwithstanding this scholar's repelling manner, she could not gain the least response from the reserved girl.

One Sunday Mrs. Morse asked for the street and number of each scholar's residence, telling them that she hoped to call on each of them during the ensuing week.

Lois' very evident unwillingness to give her address was so marked that the girls looked at her in wonder, but Mrs. Morse did not appear to notice it.

"I should think she 'd be ashamed to act that way to Mrs. Morse—just as if she did n't want her to come!" whispered Mattie indignantly; and she tried to atone for Lois' rudeness by earnestly urging Mrs. Morse to come after business hours, so that she would surely be at home. She cast a defiant glance at Florence and Nina as she spoke of her employment at the store, but her face lost every expression save that of pleasure when Mrs. Morse said kindly,

"I will come Wednesday evening about half-past six, if that time will suit you, Mattie, and then we can go to prayer-meeting together from your house."

Mattie joyfully assented to this plan, and reading the unspoken wish on the faces of her two

friends, she added, "May Etta and Nora come too and go with us?"

"Yes; that will be a very nice plan," answered Mrs. Morse cordially; and Nina looked up with an expression which, unfortunately, was very easy to interpret.

"Will Mrs. Morse really be seen with those awful girls in the street?" she thought in horrified surprise. "Why, I would n't walk as far as the corner with such a common-looking set. I do n't see how she can bear to think of it. But then she 's so good and sweet, I believe she would do anything to make even such girls as those happy;" and the expression of disdain softened into a look of loving admiration.

There was one point of mutual sympathy already between the girls she looked down upon and her own dainty self, namely, their affection for their teacher, but so far it had not drawn them nearer together.

Mrs. Morse determined to visit Lois on Monday afternoon, and she hoped that possibly she might better understand this strange girl if she tried to make her acquaintance at her own home, where she would be more apt to be her natural self than in Sunday-school, among the girls towards whom she cherished such a dislike.

She knew that Lois attended school, so she

deferred her visit till after school hours, that she might find her at home; but in this she was disappointed.

Mrs. Cramer came to the door in response to her knock, and when she introduced herself and inquired for Lois, said that Lois was taking her music lesson and would not be at home till six o'clock; but she so cordially urged Mrs. Morse to come in that she gladly consented, hoping to learn something of her pupil from Lois' mother.

The frail little figure among the pillows in the great rocking-chair caught the visitor's eye immediately, and she went towards Bertie with a smile that won him at once, shy though he usually was with strangers.

"Bertie, this is sister's Sunday-school teacher," said his mother, and the child looked up with a bright smile of welcome.

"Lois told me about you," he said. "She said I would like you, and I do."

The innocent words brought a double pleasure to Mrs. Morse as she stooped to kiss the sweet upturned face. So Lois had not really been as unapproachable as she had seemed, and her icy indifference had been simulated in part at least, or she would not have told her little brother that he would like her teacher.

The hour that passed away almost unheeded

in its flight was a pleasant one to all, and Mrs. Morse felt that she was becoming acquainted with a very different Lois from the silent, sullen girl who sat in her class every Sunday and repelled all her kindness so persistently.

The mother spoke lovingly of Lois' thoughtfulness, her sunshiny ways, and the persistence with which she was trying to fit herself for a teacher, that she might lighten the cares which rested so heavily upon her mother's shoulders.

"She is perfectly devoted to Bertie, and I do not know how he would get along without her. He thinks her arms rest him even better than mine when he has pain, and he is hardly ever out of her arms when she is at home. I think she grieves far more because Bertie has to go without so many things that he needs than because she has to go without so many of the pleasures that most girls of her age enjoy. Her one thought is of Bertie."

"Sister's so good to me," sighed the child with a look of loving content as he heard Lois' praises.

"Don't you love Lois too?" he asked presently.

"Indeed I do," answered Mrs. Morse earnestly, for the affectionate interest which she felt for Lois simply as a member of her class warmed into

love as she learned of the sorrow that had clouded the young life and of her unselfishness and thoughtfulness at home.

The unhappy expression, then, had not been the result of a sullen disposition, and Mrs. Morse was more fully determined than before to win Lois' friendship in spite of her reserve.

"I think you could hold me like Lois does," went on Bertie, looking wistfully at Mrs. Morse.

"Oh, Bertie dear, let mother hold you if you are tired of sitting still," exclaimed Mrs. Cramer.

But Mrs. Morse interposed. "I should so like to hold him a little while, Mrs. Cramer, if you think I can make him comfortable;" and she was so evidently in earnest that Mrs. Cramer yielded.

In a few moments Bertie was comfortably nestled in his new friend's motherly arms; and Mrs. Morse, looking down upon her light burden, so pitifully wasted and misshapen, marked the perfect fragile beauty of the little face and the depth of violet blue eyes with their golden-brown fringes.

The mother sat by with a pleased expression while Mrs. Morse devoted herself to the child's entertainment for a few minutes and amused him with some nursery tales that were new to him.

A light step came swiftly up stairs, and Bertie sat upright, a radiant look of expectancy lighting his face.

"That 's sister Lois!" he said joyfully.

As the footsteps reached the last flight of stairs a little trilling song was heard, and in an instant the door was thrown open and Lois came in, her face so bright that Mrs. Morse scarcely recognized her.

"Well, Bertie darling," she began; then she saw that the little family were not alone, and, as swiftly as a curtain falls the bright look vanished and the old defiant, sullen expression took its place.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Morse," she said, so coldly that her mother glanced at her in pained surprise.

"Are n't you going to kiss me, sister?" queried Bertie in grieved tones as he lifted his face in vain for the usual caress.

It was evident to Mrs. Morse that Lois was not pleased at seeing him in her arms; but as she stooped and gave him the kiss he asked for her manner to the child was as loving as it was cold to others.

"What did you learn to sing to-day, Lois?" asked Bertie as his sister laid her music-roll on the piano and removed her hat and coat.

"Does n't she sing beautifully?" he went on, looking at Mrs. Morse.

"I never heard her, dear," Mrs. Morse had to answer, though her response brought a look of surprise to the mother's face.

"Never heard my Lois sing?" asked Bertie in surprise that was half pity. "Do sing something right now, wont you, sister, so she can hear you?"

Lois tried in vain to pacify the child without yielding to his entreaty, but his persistence overcame her reluctance, and seating herself at the piano, she struck a few chords and began to sing a simple childish song that Bertie loved. Mrs. Morse looked at the singer in wonder as the sweet, pure tones rang out, and she marvelled that Lois could be so chary of her gift and so unwilling to use it.

Words of warm admiration involuntarily escaped the visitor as the song ceased, but Lois heeded them not; she only looked at the childish face to meet the look of happiness that her song always brought there.

Verily she was incomprehensible, and Mrs. Morse began to doubt her ability ever to reach this heart which seemed hidden behind a mask of ice.

But the sun's bright rays can thaw the most

stubborn ice, and so Mrs. Morse determined that her love for Lois and her earnest desire to do her good should shine steadily upon her till her pride and reserve should melt away.

Reluctantly she rose to go, placing Bertie tenderly in his sister's arms, and when she bent to kiss him farewell she imprinted a kiss on the girlish face above it.

"Bertie and I are friends already," she said softly. "I hope you will soon be friends with me too, Lois."

There was no response, and though Mrs. Morse fancied that for a moment a softer expression took the place of the defiant one, it vanished so swiftly that she could not be sure of it.

There was no way to account for Lois' apparently unreasonable dislike, and as her teacher walked swiftly homeward she determined not to be discouraged by it, even though it might be long weeks before she could win the perverse girl's friendship.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BERTIE'S GOOD TIMES.

THE door had scarcely closed behind Mrs. Morse before Lois' mother turned towards her with a look of surprised reproof.

"My dear Lois, what is the matter with you? I should not wonder if Mrs. Morse never came here again, you were so ungracious and cold in your manner; and she was so pleasant, too, that you had not the least reason for being rude."

"I don't think I was rude, mother," answered Lois, bending over Bertie to hide her flushed cheeks. "I did n't intend to make a fuss over her, for I did n't want her to come in the first place and she knew it, and I do n't want her to come again; so I do n't mean to act as if I were glad to see her."

"But why do n't you want her to come?" asked the mother in puzzled inquiry. "She is so friendly and took such an interest in Bertie—"

"But I do n't want her friendship nor any one else's," interrupted Lois, her eyes flashing. "Mother, do n't you know what friendship is worth? Did n't we find out when father died

how little our friends cared for us? Just as long as we had a lovely home, it was all right; but as soon as we had to sell everything and come and live in these little cramped-up rooms in this narrow street, our friends all left us to do what we chose. I made up my mind then that I would never trust anybody again nor make new friends, and I mean to keep to my resolution. I hate everybody in the world except you and Bertie, and I don't want anybody to like me." And gently putting the amazed child down into his nest of pillows, this sixteen-year-old misanthrope went into her room and threw herself down on the bed to burst into a storm of passionate weeping.

She would not listen to the words her mother would have uttered when she tried to show her how much they still had to be thankful for, even if riches and friends had failed them. Lois shook her head decisively.

"No, mother, it's no use for you to talk," she said drearily. "You can't make me believe that we've got anything to be thankful for. We are so poor that we can't get enough even of the necessaries of life, not to say anything about the comforts. Poor darling little Bertie suffers 'most all the time, and there are so many things that he ought to have that he doesn't; you know it yourself, and the only thing I have to look forward to

is the time when I can earn enough money to get him things, and that seems so far off that I can't wait patiently. Don't tell me to look on the bright side; there isn't any; and there isn't any use in making believe about it. And I don't want strangers to come here and see everything and shudder at Bertie's back;" and the girl's convulsive sobs broke forth again.

"But, dearest, Mrs. Morse was as loving and kind to Bertie as any one could be," said her mother. "I really think he enjoyed her visit more than he has enjoyed anything for some time."

But this speech only added to Lois' anger. "I don't want him to enjoy her visits," she burst out passionately. "I want to make him happy myself."

Mrs. Cramer saw that nothing she could say would have any effect upon Lois in her present state of mind, so she left her to exhaust her anger in tears while she busied herself in making preparations for supper.

Lois wept on, hot, bitter tears coursing like rain down her cheeks, till at last she heard Bertie's voice calling her.

"Sister, wont you come to Bertie?" he entreated. "Please come."

Obedient to the summons she could not with-

stand, though her ears might be deaf to all else, she called back, "In a minute, Bertie," and hastily bathed her face and eyes and tried to suppress the sobs which still shook her frame.

Then, thankful for the gathering twilight that shadowed her face from the child's eyes, she sat down on the floor before his chair, and laying her head in his lap let the little hands toy lovingly with her hair, now and then pressing one of them passionately to her lips.

Such outbursts were rare with Lois, and her softened, gentle manner through the rest of the evening showed that she was penitent for the hasty, rebellious words which she knew had grieved her mother.

This first visit was only the forerunner of many which Mrs. Morse made, and Bertie soon learned to watch for her nearly as eagerly as he did for Lois. Mrs. Cramer, too, always had a warm welcome awaiting her new friend.

Mrs. Morse never failed to bring some little gift to Bertie that she knew would delight the child. Sometimes it was a juicy orange or a tempting bunch of grapes, and again it would be some flowers as sweet and dainty as Bertie himself.

Three times a carriage had been placed at Mrs. Morse's disposal, and then Bertie had en-

joyed the rare, almost unknown luxury of a drive through the park.

Lois had brought herself to accept Mrs. Morse's invitation to accompany them on these occasions; not that she cared for the ride, but because she wanted to watch her darling's rapture, hard though it was for her jealous nature to see him revelling in a joy which it had not been hers to give him. She had held him in her arms, and he nestled closely to her, uttering little exclamations of delight now and then as his happiness overflowed in words. A delicate pink flush had stained the cheeks that were beginning to grow so transparently white and waxen, and the languid eyes sparkled with childish pleasure.

These rides were great events in little Bertie's life, and he never grew tired of recalling what he had seen while he was in the carriage.

One ride had been taken early in the spring, and the carriage had been stopped until a handful of fragrant blue violets were gathered for Bertie.

Even Lois, cold and reserved as she still was in her manner towards Mrs. Morse, could not but feel grateful to her for the happiness she was the means of bringing into the child's lonely, suffering life.

Lois would not admit even to herself the new fear which had taken possession of her as she

noticed how much lighter her loved burden became and how thin and frail the little hands had grown.

Suppose Bertie should be growing worse? Suppose—but she would not think of such a thing. He *should* not die; surely he was not going to be taken away from her when she loved him so dearly. No; she would soon begin to earn money and buy for him herself all the nice things that Mrs. Morse was sending him now, and more too, and then he would be strong and well. She would take him to the wisest and most skilful of physicians, and perhaps—joyful possibility!—the little crooked back might be straightened and the wasted limbs restored.

Lois could not hide from herself the fact that he was daily growing weaker and that his appetite was increasingly capricious and slender. He turned away from plain food, and not even Lois' affectionate artifices could prevail on him to eat.

Daily Mrs. Morse sent some delicacy to the child, who had found a warm place in her heart; for she could see, what Lois refused to believe, that the end of the little life of suffering was gently coming and that the burden of pain would soon be lifted.

Her pity for Lois grew apace as she found how persistently the young girl shut her eyes to the

sorrow that overclouded the near horizon, and she knew the blow would fall heavily upon that loving heart when the bereavement came.

The mother, too, noted the change in Bertie with all the keenness of a mother's eyes, and two or three times she tried to warn Lois that her treasure was slipping from her grasp, but Lois would not be warned. She could not, would not, see the truth.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FIRST PRAYER-MEETING.

MRS. MORSE did not forget her promise to call on Mattie, and when she made her way to the house at the appointed time she found the family in state in the parlor waiting to receive her.

That room had the air of having been recently put in order, as indeed it had, for Mattie had come home from work half an hour earlier than usual, and had made such a vigorous onslaught upon the chaos and confusion that prevailed that she had soon brought a tolerable semblance of order out of it.

The children were dressed in their best after being hastily washed, much to their disgust, for they had learned to look upon a thorough ablution with soap and water as a disaster of only weekly occurrence.

Supper was hurriedly eaten and cleared away, and Mattie helped her mother to make a presentable toilet, while she urged her father to don his coat and let his evening pipe wait until the visitor had departed.

Mattie was his prime favorite, so he yielded

with scarcely a grumble. Just as the last hair-pin on the mother's head had been pushed into place and Mattie had stepped back to admire her handiwork Mrs. Morse's knock was heard, and the young girl rushed so hastily to open the door that, much to her dismay, she upset Nan. That small person took this most inconvenient opportunity to raise a dismal wail, and Mattie had to take her up in her arms and soothe her before she could answer Mrs. Morse's knock.

She greeted her teacher with unfeigned delight, and ushering her into the parlor brought up the family one at a time, beginning with the father, and introduced them. This was a somewhat lengthy process, but at last it was over and they were all disposed in uncomfortable attitudes around the room, looking as if they were rather too shy to enjoy the visit much.

Nan still clung to Mattie's neck, from which safe refuge she peeped shyly at the stranger. Mrs. Morse found it quite a task to maintain the conversation, for though the father and mother seemed pleased at her visit they answered her only in monosyllables, until at last she spoke of Mattie's improvement in Sunday-school. Then both father and mother became conversational and began to talk about their favorite daughter.

"Our Mattie's a good girl, if I do say it

as should n't," said her father; and the mother chimed in,

"I could n't make out for a day without her, that I could n't, for she 's such a help to me with the children. They 'll do anything for her, they 're so fond of her."

Mattie's face glowed with rosy-red confusion as her praises were thus publicly sounded; and Nan, understanding that the conversation had turned upon sister Mattie, added her testimonial by proceeding to hug her so vigorously that her arms had to be loosened that Mattie might breathe.

"I can easily believe that Mattie is not only a good daughter, but a loving, helpful sister, she is such an attentive and willing scholar in Sunday-school," said Mrs. Morse; and Mattie's blushes deepened at this commendation from her loved teacher.

Etta and Nora came in presently and there were no more pauses in the conversation. Before many minutes it was time to start for prayer-meeting, a service which none of the girls had ever attended, and concerning which they were not a little curious.

"Wont you come with us, Mr. Brown?" asked Mrs. Morse as Mattie went to put on her hat.

"Oh, yes, father, do come!" chimed in Mat-

tie, delighted at his having received an invitation.

And his wife added, "Yes, John, you'd best go. You're all dressed and ready to go, and it's been a good while since you've been to meeting."

Thus urged Mr. Brown could not summon up courage to refuse, although a remembrance of his deferred pipe made him wish he knew how to politely and firmly decline. Still he was willing to make considerable sacrifice to please this lady who seemed to take such an interest in his Mattie, and he hid his reluctance and got his hat with apparent readiness.

After the good-bys had been said and Mrs. Morse had delighted the mother by coaxing a kiss from pretty, pouting Nan, the church-goers passed out into the hall, and a short whispered consultation took place between the girls, the result of which was that Etta and Nora, to their great delight, had the coveted places on either side of Mrs. Morse, while Mattie walked sedately behind with her father.

It was quite an event to Mr. Brown to be on his way to church. As he walked along he tried to remember when he had last been within the walls of a church, but the effort was too much for his memory and he gave it up at last.

It was quite a walk to the church, and they reached it just as the bell was sounding its last summons.

Mr. Brown felt himself to be so much of a stranger that he half dreaded the attention he was afraid he would arouse; but no one appeared to notice the little party as they walked up the aisle, although some few whispered comments were made, and more than one wondered "who that was that Mrs. Morse had with her."

Mr. Brown was comfortably seated near enough to a gas jet to be able easily to read the print in the copy of Gospel Hymns that was placed in his hand, and Mattie sat beside him, her face bright with happiness.

Mr. Morse had learned the secret of making a prayer-meeting interesting, and there was always some variety in the exercises that kept them from falling into the rut of a regular routine.

To-night there was to be a service of song, and nothing could have pleased the strangers in the audience more.

All remembrance of the foregone pipe vanished as Mr. Brown listened to the sweet, spirited singing and heard Mattie's voice ringing out beside him, "singing as good as any one," he said to himself with a thrill of fatherly pride.

There were two brief intervals of Scripture

reading and prayer, and all the remainder of the hour was given to song. The tunes were familiar ones to most of the audience, and even those who rarely sang could not resist joining in the melody. The hour passed all too quickly, and Mr. Brown gave a start of surprise when the benediction was pronounced and the service was over.

"Is it out already?" he asked, turning to Mattie.

"Yes," she answered as she saw the people leaving their seats. "Wasn't it nice, though, father?"

"Yes; I'd have been glad if it had lasted longer," he said as he left his seat. "I don't know when I have heard such singing. I wish your mother could have heard it too. You must bring her some time, for I suppose you'll be coming again. How often do they have this, anyhow?"

"Every Wednesday night, Mrs. Morse said," answered Mattie.

Mrs. Morse was waiting for them by the church door to introduce Mr. Brown to her husband and to inquire how he had liked the service; and he was more pleased than he showed by the cordial hand-clasp and warm invitation to come again that he received from the minister.

"There are certainly mighty nice folks in that

church," he said as he walked homeward with Mattie. "You would really think Mr. Morse cared whether I came again or not, he seemed so hearty-like; and he shook hands as if I had been a gentleman."

"Indeed they are nice," answered Mattie enthusiastically. "Mr. Morse is as nice as Mrs. Morse, and that's saying a good deal, for I honestly believe she's the nicest person that ever lived."

Mattie's enthusiasm concerning her teacher was not destined to meet with any check from her father, for he had been so much pleased with her kind, pleasant manners that he was not disposed to do anything but concur in his daughter's opinion.

"Well, how did you like it?" asked the mother as they reached home and found her vainly endeavoring to put Nan to sleep.

"Oh, it was lovely!" cried Mattie. "You give Nan to me, mother, as soon as I get my things off, and father'll tell you about it while I put her to sleep."

A few minutes later she was rocking backwards and forwards, singing the refrain of the hymns she had joined in that evening, while in the next room Mr. Brown between the whiffs of smoke gave his wife quite a detailed account of the evening's service.

Altogether it had been an evening to be remembered in the Brown family, and Mrs. Morse would have felt well repaid for her long walk and visit if she had known what a new interest in "the school our Mattie belongs to" had been awakened in the hearts of the father and mother by her invitation to the prayer-meeting that evening and her evident interest in Mattie. As it was, she felt an additional affection for her warm-hearted, impulsive scholar, because she appeared in such a lovable light at home.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### VISITS.

THE next Wednesday evening Mrs. Morse called upon Etta, the girls eagerly promising to meet her there and accompany her again to prayer-meeting.

Mattie was greatly disappointed that her father would not go with her.

"You liked it so much last time I should think you would want to go again, particularly when the minister himself invited you," she said reproachfully.

"Well, maybe I'll go again soon," he answered as he filled his pipe and prepared for his after-supper lounge and smoke. "You see, I a'n't washed and dressed, and it's 'most too much work to go every Wednesday evening. I'll go now and again, but you must n't look for me to go always."

So Mattie reluctantly went without him, determined to use her utmost efforts the next Wednesday evening to get him dressed in time.

Etta was by no means rejoiced at the prospect of a call from her teacher. Suppose—and her

heart beat faster at the thought—suppose her aunt should say something about her going to church Sunday evening, and her deception should be discovered!

It had become quite systematic by this time, for she left the house without query or comment when the first bell was ringing, and returned just as the church-goers were filling the streets.

If Aunt Martha should by any chance find out that she had been deceiving her all this time, what would she do? Etta trembled at the thought of her anger, for she could be very severe when she thought she had an occasion, and Etta knew that she certainly deserved blame in this matter.

She did not mention Mrs. Morse's intended visit to her aunt, for she clung to the hope that possibly her aunt might chance to be out, and the danger in that way be averted. Her hopes were doomed to disappointment, however, for directly after supper her aunt seated herself at the sewing-machine with a piece of work that Etta knew would occupy her for the entire evening.

She hoped for a little time that something might happen to detain Mrs. Morse and keep her from coming, but that wish, too, was frustrated, for even while she was thinking of this Mrs. Morse made her appearance.

Now the only resource was to watch the conversation, and whenever it seemed to wander towards the dangerous channel to turn it as quickly as possible.

It was anything but a pleasant call for Mrs. Morse, for Etta, who was always more or less shy and constrained in her aunt's presence, became doubly embarrassed by her fear, and Miss Martha refused to be won even by Mrs. Morse's pleasant manner and did not take any pains to hide her wish to return to her sewing as speedily as possible.

Finding that Miss Martha was impatient to have her take her leave, and that Etta was so constrained and apparently afraid of her aunt that the visit was no pleasure to her, Mrs. Morse made but a brief call, and Etta breathed freely when the door was safely closed behind her and no word had been spoken concerning her Sunday evenings.

Mattie and Nora were waiting for her by the outer door, and Etta's constraint vanished when the little party had started on their way to church.

The girls enjoyed the prayer-meeting no less than the service of song on the preceding Wednesday evening, and Mattie brought a smile of approval to her teacher's face by whispering,

"I guess I 'll come all the time after this. I did n't know how nice it was before."

Mattie's resolution meant that Etta and Nora would come to the same determination, for they always followed their chosen leader in good as well as mischief, and Mrs. Morse felt that a great point was already gained.

She had much to rejoice over in her class. In many ways there had been great improvements, but she had not been able as yet to draw the discordant elements into harmony, and the jealousy and dislike between the girls seemed as strong as ever.

Then, too, though without exception they all studied their Sunday-school lessons diligently and intelligently, and seemed interested in their teacher's explanations, she could not make them realize that they had a personal interest in the great truths which they met Sunday after Sunday to study.

She was anxious to invite her class to her house to spend the evening, but under existing circumstances it would be likely only to aggravate the bitter feelings, instead of allaying them.

The following Wednesday evening Mrs. Morse made her promised call upon Nora and was warmly received.

The parlor was illuminated for the occasion by every available lamp, and the family had evidently made preparations for her reception. Even Tom, moved with unusual curiosity, had stayed at home to see the wonderful teacher whom Nora quoted so constantly, and he looked so well and behaved so much better than Nora had expected he would that she felt quite a thrill of sisterly pride when she introduced him to Mrs. Morse.

Altogether it was a pleasant visit for all concerned, and Mrs. Morse determined to repeat it in the course of a few weeks.

Her principal object in selecting this evening and hour for her visits to these girls was to bring them with her to the prayer-meeting, and if possible to interest them in it, so that they would continue to come of their own accord.

These three girls were the most hopeful elements of her class, surprised as the others would have been if they had known that such was Mrs. Morse's opinion. Assuredly their home influences were not Christian, but they would not be half as hard to combat as the influence that surrounded Nina and Florence in their beautiful homes; and the interest with which they received their teacher's visits, and their evident desire to respond to her kindly feeling, gave promise that these hearts might easily be reached by tact and love and that

a bountiful harvest might be gathered for the Master.

Florence's indifference and haughtiness seemed a well-nigh impassable barrier between her teacher and herself, and Mrs. Morse well knew that her home training was only calculated to encourage her in this disposition.

Nina's impressible nature was influenced by the person nearest to her at the time, and though sometimes it seemed as if good seed had been sown, it had not root enough to spring up and bear fruit.

For Lois' love Mrs. Morse was content to wait patiently, trusting that she could not always resist her offered affection.

Continually this teacher bore the needs of her class in the arms of her loving faith to the mercy-seat, and while all other means of doing the girls good were faithfully used, yet she knew that prayer was the most powerful lever by which to raise her burden. She believed that in the Master's own time the harvest would come, so there was no room for discouragement in her heart.

Outwardly the class was almost transformed, and Mr. Pearsall sometimes wondered by what magic Mrs. Morse had effected the change. The irregular attendance and tardy entrance were entirely things of the past; in place of the listless

yawning or idle talk, the lesson seemed to be all-absorbing in its interest, and on review Sundays there was rarely a question asked which did not elicit a prompt response from these girls.

Mr. Pearsall felt relieved from the burden of a great responsibility, for hitherto this class had been the most unsatisfactory in the entire school.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BERTIE GOES HOME.

At last Lois could no longer blind her eyes to the truth. Bertie was dying. The doctor had not given them a word of hope; he had not even uttered the trite remark that "while there was life there was hope," for the little life was slowly but surely ebbing away.

Lois gave up school, and her mother had no heart to say her nay as she saw the look of hopeless sorrow that rested like a heavy cloud upon the young face. Bertie's love for her and the fond way in which he clung to her only seemed to make her pain at the thought of the coming separation keener, and she could not bear to put him out of her arms for an instant. She was selfish in her sorrow, and forgot that her mother's pain was as great as her own. She jealously claimed the privilege of attending to Bertie's wants herself; and the mother, willing to lay aside her own feelings if she could make Lois happier, let her have her way in this.

"Poor child! She will have sorrow enough soon," thought the mother as she noted how com-

pletely Lois seemed to be bound up in her love for her brother.

Bertie did not suffer much in these days, and he was passively happy and content to lie in Lois' arms while she, with a voice as clear and sweet as if her heart were not nearly bursting with sorrow, sang to him all his favorite hymns and nursery songs or told him stories by the hour.

He loved to be near the window and watch with dreamy eyes the topmost branches of a tall tree which nodded just outside and which was shaking out its new leaves as the fresh life of the spring crept up through its trunk. Little brown sparrows swung lightly on the swaying twigs and perched fearlessly on the window-sill to eat the crumbs which the tiny hands spread for them every day, and through the arabesque of the leaves and twigs glimmered the blue sky or sailing clouds.

A small enough outlook it was, but Bertie never wearied of it, and would watch the sky till Lois, with a vague fear, would draw his attention to something else and banish, if she could, the wistful expression which looked almost unearthly.

"Will my back be straight in heaven, Lois?" he asked one day, and the sister pressed him to her in an embrace that she would fain have made unending.

"Hush, hush, Bertie!" she entreated with a sob in her voice. "Don't talk so; you hurt sister. What makes you think about heaven?"

"I think I am going soon," answered Bertie. "You mustn't feel so bad, Lois. Don't cry, please!" and the little soft hand wiped away the springing tears.

"You are happy here, aren't you, darling?" she asked. "You don't want to go away?"

"I don't want to leave you and mother," he answered thoughtfully, "but, sister, I am so tired sometimes, and it is so hard to lie still all the time and never be able to run around. I used to think I would be lonesome in heaven until you and mother came, till Mrs. Morse gave me that picture," and his eyes turned towards an engraving of a shepherd bearing a lamb in his bosom which hung upon the wall.

"That makes me want to go to heaven, for Mrs. Morse said Jesus carried the little children in his arms just the way that kind man is carrying the poor little lamb, and that would be so nice. Then my back wouldn't hurt any more, and maybe it will be all strong and well. Why, sister, I should think you would be glad I was going!" and he looked up into her face with trustful eyes in which there was no shadow of fear.

Of all that we instinctively shrink from in the

thought of death Bertie knew absolutely nothing, and for him death had no terrors. His childish eyes had never looked upon the empty casket from which the soul had fled, and he had never seen a coffin committed to the earth. Death to him only meant going to heaven to live with Jesus, and he could talk of it as calmly as if the valley of the shadow of death did not lie between.

Each innocent word wrung Lois' heart with pain, and she exclaimed, "Darling, do you want to break sister's heart! I could not live without my darling Bertie to love and take care of! Would n't you rather have the pain and stay here with sister when she loves you so?"

A look of perplexity rested on the childish face for an instant as he looked at Lois; then he answered, "Yes, my Lois; I'll stay with you if you want me so; but if it was n't for that, I would rather not."

No one had told him that his growing weakness meant the gradual sundering of the ties which bound him to life, but by some intuition he seemed to realize it, and the mother, knowing how heavy the burden of suffering was for the childish strength to bear, and seeing how gladly he looked forward to a release, strove to bring her aching heart into submission to the divine will. Like all mothers, she had given her tenderest de-

votion to the child whose helplessness had made him a constant care, and the thought of giving him up was hard indeed.

Mrs. Morse came daily now to see Bertie, for her warmest sympathy was enlisted in behalf of the sorrowing family.

Lois would not listen to a word of comfort or of sympathy, and Mrs. Morse's heart ached for her as she noticed the pain expressed in the pale face and the grief she forced herself to conceal lest it should trouble Bertie. She was afraid the young girl's strength would break down under the strain imposed upon it, and she urged her to take a little rest and change.

But Lois was deaf to both Mrs. Morse's and her mother's entreaties. She would not leave Bertie for a moment, and the mere suggestion of going out for a little exercise pained her so that at last her mother forbore to say anything about it.

Friends came to the little family in this hour of trouble. Kindly offers of help in nursing were made, which Lois would have almost fiercely refused if her mother had not answered the messengers herself.

Fruit, flowers, every little delicacy that could strengthen the child or coax back his appetite, were sent in profusion, with messages of sympathy

which were grateful to the stricken mother; but Lois would hear none of them.

There was something strangely unchildlike in her defiant determination to bear her trouble alone, and her most repelling manner could not lessen Mrs. Morse's loving pity for her.

Her schoolmates knew the reason why Lois' desk was so long vacant, and some of them stopped each day with kindly inquiries; and her classmates at Sunday-school forgot their dislike when Mrs. Morse told them of the great sorrow which was overshadowing their companion. They all remembered the child's beautiful face and the misshapen form which had shocked them when Lois had brought him to Sunday-school so long ago, and the young hearts were full of pity.

"Poor Lois!" said Mattie to herself as she caught up baby Nan on her return from Sunday-school and hugged her so vigorously that Nan resented the embrace by kicking and screaming. "Nan, what would I do without you?" she asked with a warm burst of sympathy for her classmate as she thought how her own heart would ache if the little pattering feet were stilled and the baby voice hushed.

# CHAPTER X.

## ESTRANGEMENT.

"MAMMA, I want to go and see Lois Cramer," announced Nina at the supper-table one Sunday evening.

"Why, Nina, what do you want to go there for?" was the surprised query.

"Mrs. Morse told us to-day that her little lame brother is dying, and I want to go and tell her how sorry I am. Perhaps there is something she would like for him," answered Nina.

"My dear child, I could n't think of letting you do such a thing," was the energetic response. "Just as likely as not the child has some low fever or something that you would probably take yourself if you went there. If you think they are in want I have no objection to your sending them a basket of groceries."

Nina burst into a merry peal of laughter. "Excuse me, mamma, but it 's so funny to imagine Lois' face if I did such a thing as that. I know they 're not well off, for Lois always dresses very plainly and wears her clothes for ever; but she 's just as proud as I am, and I fancy she would

rather starve than have food given her. Do let me go and see her, mamma; I am sure there is n't any danger of contagion, for Mrs. Morse goes every day."

"That 's a very different thing," answered her mother. "It 's the business of a minister's wife to visit sick people, whether there is any contagion or not, but I could n't think of letting you go. Now remember, Nina, I positively forbid it."

Nina persisted and pleaded in vain, for her mother was firm in her refusal; so at last she yielded, though with no good grace. She carried out her kindly impulse in another way, however, for early the next morning she persuaded her father to fill her purse, and bought a basket of luscious strawberries, costly luxuries so early in the season, and a bunch of fragrant violets. These she sent with a gracefully worded note of sympathy to Lois, wondering not a little how the shy, reserved girl would accept her offering.

When Bertie's eyes brightened at the sight of the beautiful fruit and he ate eagerly of it, one hand contentedly clasping his violets meanwhile, Lois' heart softened towards Nina and she thought half remorsefully how often she had mentally pronounced her frivolous and heartless.

Florence refused to join in the general feeling

of sympathy, and when Nina began to speak about Lois she snubbed her so mercilessly that even the gentle-spirited Nina grew indignant.

"Really, Nina, I am not at all interested in that child," she remarked loftily. "I wish you could find something more entertaining to talk about. It must be very unpleasant to be as impressionable as you are."

"Well, it must be a great deal more unpleasant to be as selfish and hard-hearted as you are," Nina retorted. "I do n't believe you ever think about anybody besides yourself, Florence Estabrook. If you are comfortable, you do n't care how anybody else may suffer."

"Certainly not; why should I?" answered Florence calmly. "There is a great deal of suffering, both real and imaginary, in the world, and it would be very foolish to spend one's time mourning over it."

"There is a great deal of difference between that and being sorry for a friend in trouble," said Nina hotly, feeling that Florence could easily get the better of her in reasoning although her heart told her that it was right to sympathize with others' sorrow.

"Ah, then you consider Lois a friend of yours, do you?" inquired Florence with exasperating calmness. "She is decidedly out of my set

of acquaintance and I should have imagined of yours too, but perhaps you are not very fastidious in your choice of friends."

Nina was very angry and a bright wave of color flushed her fair face. "I certainly would n't be foolish enough to care so much about you if I was particular about whom I chose for my friend!" she cried. "You are a perfect iceberg, and I do n't care if I never speak to you again."

"Thank you," answered Florence with frigid politeness. "After that remark I do not think you will ever have a chance to speak to me again, unless to apologize for your rudeness;" and she turned and walked away, leaving Nina to go home alone.

Nina was too loyal to her friend to speak of their disagreement to her father and mother, though long before she reached home she had begun to regret her hasty words and the estrangement they had wrought.

She laughed and talked as merrily as usual that she might avoid questioning, and later, when some visitors came in, she entertained them with music by her father's wish; but underneath all her good spirits was the anxious wonder whether Florence would be friends with her again.

When Nina loved any one it was with a whole-hearted affection, and she was unhappy when she

had offended a friend until she had made reparation and obtained forgiveness.

She tried to assure herself for a day or two that Florence's words had been unkind and deserved a rebuke and that there was no need for her to apologize; but by Tuesday night her longing to be reconciled with her friend was so great that she cried herself to sleep. Florence's offence was entirely forgotten and Nina could only recall her own angry speeches and wonder sadly whether her friend would ever forgive her. She determined to go to Florence as soon as possible the next morning, and somewhat comforted by this resolution, she fell asleep with the tears still glistening on her cheeks.

It was very rarely that Nina Maynard ever had cause to shed tears, and the next morning her eyes were heavy and dark-rimmed and her head ached.

Her mother's anxiety was aroused at once, and if Nina had consented she would have summoned a doctor.

"A little fresh air will make me all right," insisted Nina. "I am going around to see Florence for a little while, for I have n't seen her since Sunday afternoon, and you will see that I 'll be all right by the time I come back."

"Perhaps that will do you good, darling,"

said her mother hopefully as she noticed Nina's unusual pallor, and she determined that if she was not her own bright self by dinner-time, the doctor should surely be summoned.

With swift feet Nina hastened to her friend's house and was ushered into the parlor.

"Will you tell Miss Florence I wish to see her?" she said to the maid.

"Miss Florence is just finishing her breakfast," answered the girl; "please take a seat for a little while and I 'll tell her."

Nina sank into the depths of a luxurious velvet chair, listening eagerly for Florence's footstep in the hall. Of course she would know why Nina had come and would come in at once to receive her apology.

The minutes passed away and Nina wondered how Florence could delay so long. Surely the break in their friendship must have grieved her too. If Florence had come to her, how she would have flown to meet her and hushed her apology before it was uttered.

After what seemed a long delay to the impatient girl the maid appeared in the door and said,

"Miss Florence's regrets, but she 's very much engaged this morning; would you please to excuse her?"

The hot blood rushed to Nina's face. Was it

possible that Florence really meant to refuse to see her? Her first impulse was to turn proudly away with the resolve never to make the first advance again, but her love for Florence checked this impulse.

"Oh, Annette, tell her I must see her!" she exclaimed. "Tell her I wont keep her but a moment if she is busy, but I really must see her."

The girl went up stairs, and Nina, with a beating heart, listened to Florence's light footsteps leisurely descending the stairs. She must be very angry or she would not have refused to see her.

Pretty enough to disarm any one's anger Nina looked as she stood before the door, her slender white fingers nervously clasping and unclasping and a look of penitence and sorrow on the usually bright face.

She looked eagerly into Florence's face as the latter entered the room to see whether there were any signs of relenting there. A look of cold annoyance was the only expression on the face of her friend and she did not speak to the culprit, but waited silently for her to speak.

Nina attempted a few polite words of regret, but in a moment her voice faltered, and throwing herself upon Florence's neck she sobbed, "Wont you forgive me, Florence? I'm so sorry. If you

only knew how sorry I have been for saying all those ugly, wicked things to you!"

Impulse was so utterly foreign to Florence's nature that even Nina's outburst of sorrow and penitence did not move her out of her usual unruffled calm. She had been very angry at Nina for speaking so plainly and forgetting to show her the consideration which she was used to receiving from her companions, and she had intended to make her feel the full weight of her displeasure.

Instead of returning Nina's caresses, she withdrew herself from the clinging arms, saying quietly, "I am quite ready to receive your apology, Nina, and I am glad you see the need there is for it. You certainly forgot yourself when you spoke in that way to any one you profess to have a friendship for. Pray do n't make a scene, Nina," she added in an annoyed tone as the poor child, feeling herself repulsed and unforgiven, burst into renewed tears. "There is no necessity for anything of the kind. I accept your apology. What more do you want me to say?"

She seated herself on the sofa and calmly waited for Nina to speak, inwardly triumphing at her friend's penitence.

"Oh, Florence, I want you to say you forgive me and love me again," cried Nina, throwing herself down beside her friend and burying her

face in her lap. "Don't speak to me in that cold way. Can't you be kind to me when I tell you how sorry I am?"

It was some time before Florence would relax her air of dignified displeasure, but at last, when she was satisfied that Nina was thoroughly humbled and that her wretchedness was commensurate with her offence, she condescended to comfort her.

She could not understand Nina's love being so great that she would lay her pride entirely aside and plead so humbly for pardon, for Florence knew that she herself would never stoop to confess herself in the wrong; but it pleased her to think that she had gained such a complete ascendency over her friend. If it had been possible to touch her heart, selfish as it was, surely the sight of the pretty, grieved face and the quivering lips would have prompted her to some loving impulse; but she looked on the tears complacently, gratified that Nina appreciated the enormity of her offence in having rebelled against her opinion.

"You don't love me, Florence; you can't care for me as I do for you, or you would treat me differently," complained Nina.

"Probably I would tell you I never wanted to see you again if I cared for you as you care for me," remarked Florence.

"Please don't think of those words again, Florence," entreated Nina. "You are right. You have never been as unkind to me as I have been to you;" and the tears started again.

Florence was satisfied with her triumph at last and weary of her friend's weeping; so she put her arm about Nina and drew her head down upon her shoulder, a rare caress for the undemonstrative Florence.

"Now, my dear, if you expect me to believe that you care about me as you say you do, stop crying and be sensible. Your eyes are all swollen and you wont be fit to be seen for hours."

"My head aches so, too," said Nina, drawing a long breath that was half a sigh and half a sob.

"Come up to my room and lie down a little while; then you will feel better;" and Florence led the way to her room.

She made Nina bathe her flushed face in cool water, then placed a pillow for her on the divan and insisted upon her resting for a time.

A certain sense of compunction touched her as she saw how grateful Nina was for these proofs of forgiveness and restored favor, and moved to unusual kindliness she drew a low rocking-chair to the side of the divan and bathed Nina's throbbing head with cologne.

"Kiss me once more and I will be happy

again," entreated Nina; and she clung to her friend unrebuked in a long embrace that satisfied her loving heart.

Florence was her ideal, the object of her warmest love, and she was so happy at being reconciled with her again that she mentally resolved never, never again to utter an opinion contrary to that of her friend, no matter how great might be the temptation. Suppose Florence had refused to be friends with her again!—and the blue eyes grew misty once more at the thought.

As for Florence, her calm equanimity would have been in no wise disturbed if she had never regained her friend. She had been the object of other school-girl passions, and though they gratified her pride, they never won any response; so a separation that would have made Nina wretched would have been of little moment to Florence, except that she would have missed one of her circle of admirers.

## CHAPTER XI.

"HE SHALL CARRY THE LAMBS IN HIS BOSOM."

EVERY visit that Mrs. Morse paid to Bertie she was fearful would be the last, for so slight a cord bound him to the earth, and one Saturday afternoon when she entered the room she was scarcely surprised to see the change on his face which showed that his hours were numbered.

A sorrowful group it was that she looked upon, and swift tears of sympathy filled her eyes.

Lois, as usual, sat in the chair by the window holding the dying child, while the mother sat beside her children with one little waxen hand clasped in her own.

Bertie's eyes were resting not on the sky, but on his sister's face, now and then turning, with a faint effort at a smile, to his mother. The breath fluttered very feebly through the parted lips, and already his cheeks seemed to have taken on the waxen transparency of death.

There was no need to ask how he was, and Mrs. Morse stooped silently and kissed the child, turning aside her head that he might not see the tears that his look of loving recognition brought.

So peaceful was the beautiful face and so unutterably content, that mother and sister forced themselves to hide their grief lest it should disturb their darling.

"Will you stay with us? It will not be long," said the mother, drawing a chair forward; and her quivering lips told of her anguish as the last moments of this precious little life were slipping away like the sands in an hour-glass.

For some time no word was spoken; then Bertie's lips moved and Lois bent over him to catch the faltering words.

"My—Lois," the baby pet name which he had never dropped and which Lois always loved to hear—"My Lois—sing—green pastures."

And the sister, knowing what he wanted, sang the hymn he loved best:

"In the green pastures, by the still waters."

Her voice never faltered, though her lips grew white with the effort she was making to control the pain which she thought must force itself from her in a cry.

The blue eyes rested on her face while she sang; then, even while the last words lingered on her lips, a little shiver ran through the slight figure in her arms, and with one little fluttering gasp the life of suffering ended and the eternal life began.

It was the mother who shed bitter tears over the little form; but Lois sat rigid and erect, without a tear or sob to show her grief, refusing to loosen her clasp or let the child be taken from her.

A passionate outburst of grief would have been more natural in one so young, and this apathy alarmed Mrs. Morse.

Lois did not hear anything that was said to her; she did not heed Mrs. Morse's loving touch; but her eyes rested on the dear little face with a look of love and longing that was pitiful to see.

Mrs. Morse remained until she had performed all the kindly offices she could for the stricken family. Then, when the twilight was deepening, she took her leave, just as a neighbor came in with offers of assistance in any way in which her help might be needed.

"How is Lois' little brother, Mrs. Morse?" was Mattie's first inquiry the next day when she entered Sunday-school, and the bright black eyes grew dim with tears at the thought of the sorrow of her classmate.

Nina, too, felt her heart swell with sympathy, but remembering the unhappy consequences that had attended her expression of pity the Sunday before, she forbore to mention the subject during her homeward walk with Florence.

"Girls, I'm awfully sorry for poor Lois," said Mattie to Etta and Nora as the trio left Sunday-school together.

"So am I!" chimed in both girls simultaneously.

"I'd like to do something to show her how sorry I am," Mattie went on. "Don't you think it would be nice if we three put our money together and bought some pretty flowers to send for the funeral?"

This plan met with unanimous approval, and the next day the girls appropriated their brief lunch-time to a hasty visit at a neighboring florist's, where, after some discussion, they decided upon a crown of white flowers.

"Make it just as pretty as you can, please," said Mattie as she handed over the pieces of silver which represented not a little self-denial on the part of the givers. In their desire to show their sympathy they had each contributed generously to their joint offering, and the box of creamy white rosebuds that Nina sent did not represent a tenth of the self-denial which the other gift had cost.

Mr. and Mrs. Morse both called frequently during the long dark days that intervened before the funeral, and other friends showed the little family every possible kindness; but there are

some clouds so dark and heavy that even sympathy cannot lighten them much, and though Mrs. Cramer appreciated the kindness that was shown her, still the darkness of those first days seemed almost unendurable. Lois had not shed a tear, but was still in the state of apathetic grief which had alarmed Mrs. Morse.

She would not see any one who came in, but locked herself in her room, refusing admittance to every one; then when the strangers were gone she would go back to her post beside the little coffin.

"She has not eaten nor slept since Bertie died," her mother said tearfully, her anxiety concerning the child that was spared to her distracting her in a small measure from her grief at the loss of the other. "I cannot do anything with her, Mrs. Morse; she will not listen to me, poor child. She is nearly beside herself with grief, I know, and yet she will not give it any expression. Wont you go in and talk to her? If you could only bring the tears, I think it would be a great relief to her, for she will break down under this strain unless there is some reaction. You will not mind if she does not seem to welcome you?" Mrs. Cramer, remembering Lois' invariable coldness, added half entreatingly as Mrs. Morse moved towards the bedroom door.

Mrs. Morse reassured her and quietly opened the door and entered the room where Lois was extended upon the bed, her face buried in the pillow and a soft golden curl tightly clasped in her hand. A picture of despair she was indeed, and her whole attitude spoke of her hopeless sorrow. What words would bring comfort to this bereaved heart, Mrs. Morse wondered as she seated herself beside her and rested a hand with loving pressure on the dark hair.

"Lois dear," she said gently, as the girl did not notice her presence.

With a gesture of impatience Lois looked up, pushing back her hair from her forehead. Her face was set and rigid and her eyes burned with unnatural brilliancy. This tearless grief was sadder to look upon than any abandonment of tears could have been.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

"I want to comfort you, dear, if I can," Mrs. Morse said gently.

"Comfort!" Lois echoed the word with a harsh, strained laugh. "Comfort! There is no comfort for me. Can you give me back Bertie? That is all that can comfort me. I cannot live without him, and it is too cruel that he should be taken away from me. He was all that I had to make me happy, and I have studied and worked

for so many years so that I might take care of him, and now when the time was almost come he must be taken away. Poor little Bertie! he never knew all I meant to do for him."

"Lois, try to forget your loneliness, and remember how happy he must be at being freed from his burden of suffering. Even you, with all your love, could not lighten that," said Mrs. Morse, wishing she could strike some chord that would vibrate responsively in this desolate heart.

But Lois only shook her head. "He was happy here, though, if he did suffer, and I could have made him so happy that he would not have minded his lameness and pain. It was cruel and unjust to take him away from me. You need not tell me it is wicked to say that," she went on defiantly. "I don't care if it is; I *will* say it. It was cruel to make innocent little Bertie suffer as he did. If God can prevent such things, why didn't he make him strong and well like other children? When He saw how I loved him, why didn't He let me keep him? I had not much to make me happy, and now everything is taken away from me. I want to die too, for I cannot live without Bertie. I thought about him all the time I was studying and practising, and all I looked forward to was working for him. No; there is no comfort for me now I have lost Bertie."

# CHAPTER XII.

## COMFORT.

A SWIFT prayer for wisdom to choose her words aright went up from the depths of Mrs. Morse's heart. This was no time to reprove the heart-broken girl for her rebellious words; she must rather lead her to look upon her trouble in a different light.

"Lois, I know it will be hard for you to believe what I am going to say now while your loss seems so hard to bear, but it is true, and has comforted me many a time when I could not see any other ray of light in my darkness. It is in infinite love and wisdom that God sends us these great troubles."

"Don't talk to me that way," answered Lois in the harsh, strained voice which showed the unnatural tension of her nerves. "You have never had any trouble like mine, or you could not say such things."

"Dear child," answered Mrs. Morse after a moment's pause, "let me tell you something of my sorrows, and you will not say that. I know that each heart thinks its own burden is the heav-

iest, but my cause for mourning was no light one. I had three dear little ones, and my love for them seemed to fill all my life. In one short week God took them all from me and my home was left empty and desolate. Only my faith that God had ordered this trial in love kept me from sinking under my burden. Dear, I know just how lonely and desolate your heart is, for I have been bereaved too, and I want to share with you the comfort that sustained me in those dark hours. I do not think of my treasures as being buried beneath the three little mounds in the cemetery; that would be too hard to bear; but I remember that Jesus carries the lambs in his bosom, and I think of them as being there in that safe refuge. Lois, I cannot tell you how I loved my little ones; only a mother knows the depth of a mother's love; but though my heart is yet sore with the longing to hear the sweet baby voices again, I would not call them back to this world of suffering if I could. Dearest, you would not call darling little Bertie back again to suffer, would you? He wanted to go. Much as he loved you and loved his mother, he wanted to be with Jesus. He left a message with me for you. Shall I tell it to you now?"

"Yes," was the smothered response.

"He said, 'When I go away, I want you to tell Lois not to be sorry for me. Tell her I shall

love her all the time just as if I was here; and when she looks at my picture she must think that Jesus is carrying me in his arms just the way the kind shepherd is carrying the little lamb. Don't let Lois be sorry,' he repeated again, and he left to me the task of comforting you. I loved little Bertie dearly, and I love you too, Lois, though I think you have not liked me. For Bertie's sake will you not let me comfort you and be your friend?"

The voice was very tender and loving, and the motherly arms drew Lois to her in a close embrace which the girl did not resist.

For a few moments there was silence. Then convulsive sobs shook the slight figure from head to foot as the long pent-up grief found expression, and the tears fell in a refreshing rain, relieving the burning, overwrought brain.

Mrs. Morse did not seek to check the violence of the girl's grief, only held her more closely to her and with loving touch caressed her. Her heart ached as the sight of this bitter sorrow reopened the scarcely healed wounds of her own loss, and she silently prayed that God would send comfort as he only could to the mourning family.

"Don't let Lois be sorry."

The sister could almost hear the words in the sweet voice that was so silent now, and this token

of the little brother's loving care for her pierced through the dull apathy of despairing grief and opened the fount of tears.

"O Bertie, Bertie!" she sobbed. "How can I live without him?" and the thought brought a fresh outburst of grief.

"Bertie loved you too," she said after a while, when her emotions had exhausted themselves and she lay quiet and worn out with the violence of her tears, with her head pillowed on Mrs. Morse's shoulder. "I am ashamed to tell you, but it made me angry to know that he cared about any one but me; and I could not bear to think that you could give him things that pleased him when I wanted to so and could n't. I was glad to have him happy, yet I hated to know that it was some one else that made him so. You do n't know how I loved him!" and her lips quivered.

"Your love made him very happy, I know," answered Mrs. Morse; "and, Lois dear, think how much more miserable you would be if you had to look back upon selfish acts or unkind words. He never knew anything but love from you, and you must let that comfort you. You did all you could to make his life a happy one while he was here with you. And now you have your mother to comfort and care for. I am afraid you have forgotten her in your own sorrow. Not the fondest

love of a sister can exceed a mother's love, and your mother needs all the love and sympathy you can show her just now. You have been so absorbed in your grief that it has left her to bear hers all alone, and made it doubly hard for her. Can't you be brave enough to lay your own grief aside, dear, and comfort her? I know you can do it if you will, for I know how bravely you kept back the tears when they might have grieved Bertie. Wont you make the effort again?"

She had struck the right chord at last. Lois could be strong and unselfish when she realized another's need of her.

"Poor mother! I forgot her," she said thoughtfully. "How selfish I have been! I was so miserable myself that I did not remember how lonely she must be too; and she is such a dear, good mother that she never once reproached me with it. Thank you for reminding me, Mrs. Morse."

She rose from the bed, and pressing the soft lock of hair tenderly to her lips laid it down, while she bathed her burning face and brushed her hair.

Then she turned back to Mrs. Morse, quiet and composed now, though the sorrow in the pallid face and dark-ringed eyes was eloquent. Kneeling beside her friend, "I must say something to you," she began, and paused.

Mrs. Morse anticipated her words. "If it is anything about the past, dear, you need not say it. We will begin anew to-day. I was willing to wait until you understood me."

"No, I must say it, though you are so good," answered Lois gratefully. "I don't want to make excuses for having been so ugly to you when you have always been kindness itself to me; but I want to tell you it was partly because I was so unhappy that I was so determined not to be friends with you. When father died so many of our friends gave us up that it made me feel as if I hated all the world and would never trust any one again; and the kinder you were to me the more I determined not to yield. I have not deserved your kindness this morning, after all my hatefulness; but if you will forgive me—" and she looked up pleadingly.

"Dear Lois, I do not feel that I have anything to forgive," answered Mrs. Morse lovingly, drawing Lois to her, with a glad sense that at last patient love had conquered and she had won this wayward heart. "Now we shall be firmer friends in the future, I know;" and she kissed the face, which wore a softened, subdued expression, very different from the usual hard, defiant look. "Now will you go to your mother, dear, and comfort her?"

"Yes," answered Lois, returning Mrs. Morse's caress before she rose, and they went together in search of the lonely mother.

Lois paused before the little coffin that stood in the centre of the room and leaned over it with a loving, lingering look.

Even more beautiful than it had been in life was the sweet little face, so tranquilly peaceful, the soft golden hair falling about it and hiding all trace of deformity, while the tiny hands clasped some of Nina's white rosebuds. It was more like sleep than death, and it was no wonder the sister's eyes rested fondly on the beautiful picture.

Mrs. Cramer came in, her face pale and grief-worn, and when Lois turned and saw her her heart smote her for her selfishness and neglect.

"Mother!" she cried, stretching out her arms, and in another instant the mother and daughter were locked in a close embrace, while their tears mingled.

Mrs. Morse came quietly away and left them there beside the little coffin with its quiet form, and they were alone in the sacredness of their sorrow.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE FUNERAL.

NINA won from her mother a reluctant consent to her attendance at Bertie's funeral. She knew it would be of no use to ask Florence to accompany her, and she was shy about going alone; so just as Mrs. Morse was about to start she was surprised at Nina's appearance and timid inquiry whether she might accompany her to the funeral.

"Certainly, Nina," she answered cordially. "I am so glad you thought of going. I am sure Lois will appreciate your sympathy. I must tell you now what I know she will tell you after a time, how much pleased Bertie was with your gift. He seemed to enjoy the strawberries more than anything he had eaten for some time past, and he held the violets in his hand until they withered. It was a kind thought, dear."

Nina's face grew bright at her teacher's words. A petted only child, with every wish anticipated, she rarely had an opportunity to show kindness to any one, and her heart was gladdened at the thought that she had added any pleasure to the last days of a dying child.

Nina was not the only one of her class who had thought of attending the funeral. Early that morning Mattie had come to her teacher to know whether she thought Lois would be pleased if the three girls should be present at the funeral services, or whether she would regard it as an intrusion.

"I am sure she will be glad to know that you remembered her in her sorrow, Mattie," Mrs. Morse had answered.

"Then we 'll get half a day off from the store and go home at noon and get dressed," Mattie answered, and hurried away, fearful that, notwithstanding her early start, she might be late in reaching the store.

So it happened that at two o'clock all of the class but Florence were there, subdued and sympathetic as they looked on the sorrow that none of them had ever known themselves.

Nina's blue eyes grew misty as she looked at the sweet face.

"Poor Lois! How could she give him up when he is so beautiful?" she whispered to Mrs. Morse, her heart full of sympathy.

Warm-hearted Mattie sobbed aloud as she buried her face in her handkerchief; Etta and Nora were hardly less moved; and as Mr. Morse proceeded with the solemn and beautiful words of

the funeral service, and spoke words of hope to the mourners, many a subdued sob was heard.

The sympathy that Nina and Mattie and her two friends felt for Lois drew them nearer together than anything else would have done; and beside Bertie's coffin much of the bitter dislike and scorn which had separated the girls melted away never to return.

"I didn't think she had heart enough to care about anybody else's troubles," thought Mattie self-reproachfully, "and here she feels as bad as anybody. I haven't been fair to her, I guess. I don't believe she is half as proud and stuck-up as I thought she was."

And Nina thought, "Those girls are good-hearted, if they are so common. It was real nice in them to think of sending that crown of violets, and then it's good in them to come. But what dresses to wear at a funeral! Those big red roses on Mattie's hat are dreadfully out of place, though they look comparatively quiet compared to Nora's red velveteen. I suppose they don't know any better, though, poor things. I have half a mind to speak to them when we go out and say something pleasant. I wonder what Florence would say."

The solemn words of the prayer chained her wandering thoughts, and for the first time in her

happy, care-free existence Nina had an uneasy conviction that something was lacking in her life, and that, full of health and strength as she was, death must come to her some day, and what then?

No wonder the question troubled her, for she could not answer it satisfactorily.

There was only one carriage to convey the little family and Mr. Morse to the cemetery, and the others quietly went their homeward ways at the conclusion of the service.

Nina was in such a softened mood that it was no effort for her to carry out her kindly intention of speaking to her classmates, and they were both surprised and delighted at the friendly, though hushed, greeting they received from the girl who had hitherto disdained to notice them. She walked with them to the corner where their paths separated, forgetting her old wonder how Mrs. Morse could bear to be seen on the street with them; then, bidding them a pleasant farewell, she joined Mrs. Morse, whose homeward steps turned in the same direction as her own.

Mrs. Morse saw that Nina was impressed by the solemn service she had witnessed, and she wished that she might have an opportunity to deepen the serious impressions by a quiet conversation.

"Wont you come in, Nina?" she asked as she reached her doorstep; then, seeing that the young girl looked half disposed to accept her invitation, she added, "I wish you could spend the rest of the afternoon and take tea with me. Wont you? I will send a message to your mother, so she will not be uneasy about you. I shall be quite alone, for Mr. Morse will not be back for some time, and I should be very glad to have you."

Nina gladly accepted the invitation, delighted at the thought of a long tête-à-tête with her beloved teacher, and a note was speedily despatched to Mrs. Maynard telling her where Nina was.

"What a cosey time we will have!" exclaimed Nina in delight as Mrs. Morse took her up to her own pretty room, where they would be safe from interruptions. "No, please; if you will let me make myself comfortable in my own way, I would rather sit here on this ottoman and put my head in your lap than take a rocking-chair. I shall feel so much nearer to you."

Mrs. Morse smiled as Nina nestled down in her favorite attitude, the fluffy golden hair resting on the lady's knee while the blue eyes looked lovingly up into her face.

"Do you know that you did something that pleased me very much to-day, Nina?" she asked

as she clasped the hand that was put into her own with a loving pressure.

"I'm so glad!" Nina answered. "What was it, Mrs. Morse? Going to Bertie's funeral?"

"No, that was not what I meant, though I was glad to see you express your sympathy with Lois."

"Then I can't guess what it was," answered Nina. "I'll do it again, Mrs. Morse, if you will tell me what it was," she added with a mischievous glance.

"Then I will certainly tell you," responded her teacher. "I was so pleased to see you speaking pleasantly to Mattie and Etta and Nora. You don't know how it has grieved me to see the divisions in my class and the unkind feeling which has seemed to exist among you; and to-day you took the first step towards bringing about a better state of feeling. It wasn't very hard, was it, dear?"

"No; it wasn't hard to-day," admitted Nina, "though somehow I never felt like speaking to them before. I wish they weren't such common girls, Mrs. Morse; then I would like them. They do dress so! Did you see the bright things they had on at the funeral, all the red roses and scarlet bows?"

"Yes, dear, I noticed it; but then I knew something that you didn't, so I did not feel as

you did about it," answered Mrs. Morse. "I think perhaps you will have a kinder feeling towards those girls if I tell you some things about them that I have learned. You have such an abundance of pretty toilets that I don't suppose it has ever occurred to you that they have but one best dress; so they had no choice but to wear their best to this service, for in their every-day clothes they would not have felt that they were showing any respect to Lois. Then it cost them something to come to the funeral. They are all employed in a store, and being absent for two or three hours means the loss of half a day's wages; yet they were willing to lose this to show their sympathy and kindly feeling. The flowers they sent cost them nearly another day's wages; and I fancy, Nina dear, that in all your life you have never done as much hard work as is done in one day by those girls who stand behind counters waiting on customers who are apt to be impatient and thoughtless sometimes, and thus add to the necessary labor of the saleswomen."

"It must be dreadful to have to work so hard for one's living," murmured Nina thoughtfully, beginning to realize that all lives were not as carefully shielded as her own from all that was unpleasant.

"I think you would admire Mattie if you saw

her at home," continued Mrs. Morse. "Yes; I mean *admire*, Nina," as the young girl looked up in surprise. "You may not admire her lack of taste and her showy dress, but you could not help admiring her bright unselfish spirit. There is a large family of younger brothers and sisters, and as soon as Mattie gets home from the store she goes to work to help her mother. There are always little household duties that the mother has set aside for her; and besides doing those, Mattie does most of the sewing for the children. From the time when she gets up in the morning until she goes to bed at night she is hard at work, but her mother says she never complains about being overworked, and is always willing and ready to do anything she can, while her father says it's like the sunshine when Mattie comes in. Now don't you think there is a great deal to admire in Mattie, though you may have few interests or tastes in common?"

"I suppose I should fall in love with her if she were a girl in a story-book," answered Nina, who had been listening with interest. "I shall like her after this, anyway," she added. "I never knew there was anything nice about her, and her gorgeous dresses and paste jewelry set me against her. I can't understand how any girl can wear such things."

"I think I understand it," answered Mrs. Morse. "She has a girlish love for pretty things, just as you have; but she has neither the means nor the taste to gratify her desires as you do, so she satisfies herself with cheap, gay finery; and as her taste has never been educated, she is quite as contented with her dresses as you are with your more tasteful ones."

"I am glad she can be satisfied with them," said Nina, forgetting that scarcely three weeks ago she had echoed her mother's wish that "shop-girls and all that set might be restricted to a neat uniform, instead of being allowed to perpetrate outrageous imitations of other people's toilets."

"Tell me about the other girls, please, Mrs. Morse," she begged.

And the teacher, delighted at her increasing interest in her classmates, gladly told her all about their lives that she thought would interest her and win her sympathy.

"They haven't any of them got as happy a home as I have," said Nina after a few moments' silent thought. "I'm sorry I have always looked down on them so, Mrs. Morse, and after this I do mean to treat them nicely; truly I do. It has been so silly in me to hold myself so far above them, for I never did anything to deserve a better home than they have; and I am afraid I have

often hurt their feelings. It was so mean in me to do anything to make them unhappy, when I have so much more to make me happy than they. Mrs. Morse, I 'm so glad you have always been so sweet and lovely to them. It used to provoke me to see you just as pleasant to them as you were to me, but I 'm glad now."

Nina's better impulses were happily reached, and Mrs. Morse was not afraid that she would ever relapse into her old way of contemptuous indifference.

"Now I am going to ask your help about something, Nina," she said; and the young girl joyfully answered,

"I 'm so glad! There is n't anything I should like better than helping you."

"I do n't think those three girls have much pleasure in their lives, and I want to ask them here to spend a pleasant, social evening; but I want to invite all my class at the same time, so they will not feel that they are singled out by themselves. Now may I depend on you to help me entertain them so that they will have a pleasant time? Lois of course will not care to come, but I want you to bring Florence."

Nina hesitated and flushed as she imagined the disgust Florence would express at the mere idea of spending an evening in such company. Then

she answered slowly, "I don't believe I could bring Florence, Mrs. Morse. She 's just lovely, and my dearest friend, but I 'm afraid she would not come if she knew the rest of the class were coming; and if she came without knowing it, I am pretty sure it would n't be very pleasant."

Mrs. Morse smiled at Nina's cautious admission that it would not be very pleasant. "Well, I will invite her, at any rate," she said brightly, "and she can use her own discretion about coming, of course."

"I'll be as kind as can be to the girls, myself," answered Nina, "and I would really be glad of a chance to show them I was sorry for the way I have been treating them."

So Mrs. Morse saw the way opening now to carry out her plan successfully.

# CHAPTER XIV.

## THE INVITATIONS.

THERE was so much that was lovable and unselfish in Nina's disposition that even her home-training and influence had not resulted in making her wholly worldly and frivolous.

Mrs. Morse longed to arouse all that was noble and womanly in her, and bring her to consecrate her young life, with all its possibilities, to the Saviour, and she wondered whether it would be a hard task to awaken her to a sense of her need of him.

Even while she was pondering this subject Nina spoke with a little sigh. "Mrs. Morse, I half wish I had not gone to the funeral this afternoon."

"Why, dear?"

"It makes me feel so unsatisfied and uncomfortable, somehow. I want something, I don't know what."

"Shall I tell you, Nina?"

"Yes, please," answered Nina, half surprised at the question.

Nina never forgot the earnest, loving talk that

followed. Even if she had not loved and admired the speaker, she could not have failed to be touched and impressed by her earnestness; and loving her as she did, every word sank deep into her heart.

She had heard the same truths preached from the pulpit hundreds of times, for her father and mother never failed to attend church once every Sunday, no matter how they might spend the rest of the day.

In Sunday-school Mrs. Morse had often tried to impress her class with the reality of the truths they were studying, but Nina had always supposed in a vague way that these words were meant for somebody else rather than for herself; this afternoon, however, there was no escape from the sense that she herself was the only one intended.

"Nina dear, wont you think about what I have been saying when you are alone in your room to-night and try to decide now for Jesus? He has been waiting for you so long, and you do not know what peace and happiness you are missing by staying away from him."

Nina threw her arms impulsively about her teacher's neck. "I love you for caring so much about me," she said earnestly. "Nobody ever talked that way to me before, and I know lots of church members. I never thought that all the

things I heard on Sunday were really true. Oh, I don't mean just that," she added hastily, as she saw the look of surprise on Mrs. Morse's face. "Of course I knew they were true, but I didn't know people ever thought about them or talked about them any time but on Sunday. I will try to be good just to please you."

"I want you to have a higher motive than that, darling," answered Mrs. Morse as she drew the loving girl closer to her. "I shall pray very often that God will draw you to him and make you his own. Don't you want me to ask him now?"

"Yes, please," whispered Nina, and with her teacher's arm lovingly encircling her the two knelt down in that quiet room, and half wonderingly, half fearfully Nina heard herself being commended to her Heavenly Father's love and mercy. No other prayer she had ever listened to had touched her heart as this one did, and when she arose from her knees her cheeks were wet with tears of mingled feelings.

They sat in the quiet twilight until Mr. Morse's returning footsteps were heard; then the tea-bell sounded its summons, and they went down to the cosey meal.

When the time came to go Nina reluctantly bade her friend farewell, whispering, "I am so

glad you asked me to spend this afternoon with you; I have been so happy; and I shall never forget what you have said."

Mr. Morse accompanied her home, and Nina found that he could be very entertaining and pleasant, if he was a minister, and she was pleased when her father insisted upon his coming in and making a short call before he returned home.

She did not enter into the full particulars of her afternoon's doings, but contented herself with telling her father and mother that she had enjoyed her visit with Mrs. Morse very much.

She was glad to gain the solitude of her own room, for she wanted an opportunity for thought, and in the silence Mrs. Morse's earnest words came back to her. Almost they determined her to decide to give her life to God, but she held back from the final surrender of self and pleaded for more time before decision; so the matter was left unsettled.

Mrs. Morse would have been encouraged, however, if she could have known for how long a time Nina's thoughts, for the first time in her life, turned upon the subject of her personal salvation, and she would have looked forward hopefully to a speedy harvest.

She soon put her plan of inviting her class to spend the evening with her into execution.

Mattie, on her return home one evening after a particularly trying and tiring day in the store, forgot all her troubles in her delight at finding a letter in Mrs. Morse's graceful handwriting directed to her.

"What is it, Mattie?" asked her mother eagerly as Mattie gave a cry of delight, and snatching Nan up from the floor, whirled her about in an impromptu dance; and the wondering children echoed,

"What is it?"

"You could n't guess, so I 'll tell you," said Mattie proudly. "It 's nothing less than an invitation for me to take tea at Mrs. Morse's house to-morrow evening. What do you think of that, mother?"

"I think she 's a daisy teacher," interposed Mattie's small brother, dropping into the slang which he found best expressed his opinion on the subject.

"I do think it 's lovely in her," exclaimed Mattie enthusiastically. "I wonder if all the class are invited. I must run over to Nora's after tea and see if she has an invitation too."

Before she had leisure to carry out this intention, and while the family were still gathered at the table, Etta and Nora came in, each proudly waving an invitation.

"Wont we have a nice time, though!" exclaimed Etta. "You ought to have seen aunt's face when she read the note. 'I suppose you can go since you're invited,' she said, 'but I don't know what on earth she wants you for.' I wish I had a new dress to wear."

"You extravagant girl!" laughed Mattie. "Why, you've had two new dresses since I have had one. You'll look plenty nice enough. Wasn't it nice in her to have tea at seven? She knew if it was any earlier we would have to lose time at the store."

Such an event as that invitation was to these three girls! They talked of it all the evening, and all the next day their conversation was interlarded with allusions to it, and the afternoon hours had never seemed to drag themselves away as slowly as they did upon this particular day.

At last the laggard hands crept around the dial and pointed to six o'clock, and with beaming faces the girls hastily started homeward, impatient of the smallest delay, lest they should not reach Mrs. Morse's house at the appointed hour.

Nina was looking forward to the evening too, though with less of eagerness than the other invited guests. She was very proud of having been taken into Mrs. Morse's confidence, and determined to prove herself worthy of it. She was

greatly dismayed, therefore, when she mentioned the invitation to her mother, saying that it included the class, to hear,

"Why, Nina, you must be crazy to think of spending the evening with those girls! What is Mrs. Morse thinking of to ask you to do such a thing? I can't think of letting you go."

"O mamma," cried Nina, "I have just set my heart on going. I'll be dreadfully disappointed if you don't let me."

"Why, I never heard anything so ridiculous from you," answered her mother. "What possible pleasure could you find in spending an evening with such low, common girls? It's just a foolish notion of yours, and you must put it out of your head. Papa will take you to the opera if you give this other crazy notion up. Now do be reasonable, my dear."

But Nina was not to be turned aside from her purpose by even so seductive a bribe as the promise of an evening at the opera.

"Now, mamma dear," she said coaxingly, with her arms about her mother's neck, "this isn't a whim. I want to go to Mrs. Morse's just *awfully*, and if I can't go there I don't want to go anywhere else. You wont deny me when you know that I really have been counting on going."

As Nina hoped, her mother was not proof

against this entreaty, and very reluctantly she gave her consent.

"But tell me what you want to go for, dear," she asked curiously.

Nina blushed a little as she said, "Now you must promise not to laugh at me if I tell you, wont you? Well, I want to help Mrs. Morse give those girls a good time. If I had to work in a store all day long I'd like to have a good time once in a while, and so I want to go and help Mrs. Morse entertain them."

Mrs. Maynard opened her eyes in surprise. "Well, what ever put that notion into your head?" she exclaimed.

But Nina put her hand over her mouth laughingly. "You promised not to laugh at me, mamma, and you must keep your word. Thank you ever so much for letting me go;" and she ran up to her room to avoid any further discussion of the subject, lest even yet permission might be revoked.

# CHAPTER XV.

## THE TEA-PARTY.

Of the invited guests Nina was the first to arrive, and she was just telling Mrs. Morse how hard it had been for her to convince her mother that she really expected to enjoy an evening spent with her class, when the door-bell rang and the other guests were announced.

Nina's first inquiry had been as to whether Florence was coming, and it was with a feeling of decided relief that she heard she had sent a regret.

"I'm glad," thought Nina; "for I know she would n't have enjoyed the evening herself if she had come, and she would have scared the other girls so they would n't have enjoyed it either; and then if I had been nice to them, very probably she would have been cross at me for it; so it 's better as it is."

Mattie was seized with a sudden fit of shyness after she had rung the door-bell, and was strongly tempted to yield to a childish impulse and run away; but Mrs. Morse's cordial greeting soon put her, and her companions also, at their ease.

Still the few minutes spent in the parlor before the ringing of the tea-bell proved a trying time, for the girls, with flushed faces, sat upright on the edge of their chairs and seemed to be too embarrassed to respond to any of the efforts that Mrs. Morse made to engage them in conversation.

The tea-bell was a welcome signal to all. Gathered around the prettily-set table with its delicate, old-fashioned china and appetizing food, the girls soon forgot their embarrassment and began to really enjoy their evening.

If Nina had had some expectation that they would not be able to conduct themselves with propriety at a table so very different from what she imagined they were used to at home, she was agreeably disappointed, for they behaved well and evidently were not under too great restraint to enjoy themselves.

Nina kept her promise of helping Mrs. Morse. Mattie was seated beside her at the table, and she talked pleasantly to her in all the little pauses of the general conversation. There was no condescension in her manner, for Mattie would have been quick to note and resent it; but she was as unaffectedly interested in all that her neighbor said as if she had been sitting beside Florence.

The pleasant conversation prolonged the re-

past considerably, and before they rose from the table the girls were unanimous in their favorable opinion of Mr. Morse.

They returned to the parlor, where the open piano with music scattered over it was suggestive.

"Nina, wont you play something for us?" asked Mrs. Morse; and the girls listened and looked in delighted admiration as her slender fingers ran over the keys in a brilliant fantasia with what appeared to them to be marvellous rapidity.

There was an involuntary chorus of applause when she struck the last chord, and Mattie timidly begged her to play again. Nina complied with such good-humored readiness that she quite completed her conquest of her classmate, and under the influence of her winning smiles and pleasant words that evening Mattie forgot that this same girl had ever brought tears to her eyes by her scornful treatment.

After Nina had finished playing they all sang their favorites among the familiar Sunday-school hymns, and Mr. Morse joined them with his rich bass.

Then Mrs. Morse proposed some games, and the evening passed away all too quickly. When the clock on the mantel-piece chimed the hour of ten, Etta looked up in startled dismay.

"Oh, is it really ten o'clock? I promised aunt that I would be home at nine."

"I had no idea it was so late," said Mattie with motherly solicitude, for she felt as if Etta was under her care. "Well, we'll hurry and get home as soon as we can."

Mr. Maynard called for Nina; and much to the surprise of the other girls, when they came down stairs with their things on they found Mr. Morse ready to escort them home.

"I never had such a lovely time in all my life!" exclaimed Nora enthusiastically, as she bade Mrs. Morse good night.

"Nor I either," said Etta.

And Mattie added, "I wish I had some way of making you have as nice a time as you've given us this evening."

Aunt Martha was disposed to be very angry at her niece's long stay, but when the minister himself brought her home, and said they had enjoyed her visit, she was too amazed to utter a single word of reproof.

Although Mrs. Morse felt more than repaid for the little trouble the tea-party had cost her, by the girls' happy faces and their evident enjoyment of the evening, still she had very little idea what a bright spot it had made in the monotony of their lives. For days afterwards they

talked about it, and it became a date from which they reckoned all subsequent events.

Some people might have wondered that she took as much pains with the arrangement of the table and the preparation of the supper as if the most honored and critical guests were coming; but nothing of the daintiness and delicacy was lost upon the beauty-loving girls, even though their taste might not have been highly cultivated.

It had been a successful evening in every way, and the girls were caught more firmly in the meshes of the net of love which their teacher was striving to throw about them.

The utter absence of all jealousy or bitter feeling between Nina and the other girls rejoiced her greatly, and her heart yearned over the loving, impulsive girl who could so easily be influenced aright.

There was no cloud to mar the perfect happiness of the evening for any except Nina.

"What will Florence say?" was her half-fearful thought, for she could not bear the idea of another estrangement.

When she met Florence the next day she hoped for a time that her friend would not mention the subject; but her hopes were rudely dashed to the ground when Florence, with an ominous

apparent ignorance of Nina's whereabouts on the previous evening, remarked,

"I was quite disappointed that you did not run over to see me last evening, Nina. I laid out some duets and thought we would have a cosey evening all by ourselves, for father and mother were both out. I felt just like talking to you, and I was really disappointed when it grew so late that I had to give up all hopes of you."

Nina's cheeks grew pink. She was sure that Florence knew where she had spent the evening, and it was very hard to answer her apparently innocent observation.

"Why, I thought you knew. I had an invitation to take tea at Mrs. Morse's last evening," she began faintly. "Did n't you have an invitation too?"

"Yes; but of course I never thought for a moment of accepting it," Florence replied. "It is quite bad enough to have to sit in the same class with those girls on Sunday without deliberately going to spend the evening with them. Surely you did not go, Nina?"

It was very hard for poor Nina to answer this question when Florence asked it in tones of such icy surprise. "Yes, I went," she said, half wishing now that she had not gone, since she was so surely to incur Florence's displeasure.

"Why, Nina Maynard! I would not have believed it a possible thing if you had not told me yourself. As it is, I must believe there is some mistake about it. Surely you did not go knowing that you were to meet those very objectionable girls?"

"Yes," faltered Nina, feeling quite overcome with the appalling magnitude of her offence. She did not venture to look up until the silence that followed grew unendurable; then the look of cold disapprobation on Florence's face almost brought tears to her eyes.

"Florence, please don't be angry with me," she cried entreatingly.

"Why, Nina, there is no reason why I should be angry at anything you may choose to do," Florence answered in the hard tones that always wounded Nina's tender heart so sorely. "You may choose your friends where you please; it is nothing to me." And she changed the subject with an air that convinced Nina it would be wisest to say nothing more about the occasion of offence at present.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### QUESTIONS.

MRS. MORSE sometimes despaired of ever winning any influence over Florence, she seemed such a perfect woman of the world, young in years as she was; and though intellectually she was one of Mrs. Morse's most interesting scholars, she plainly manifested her determination not to pay the least attention to any of the personal applications that her teacher tried each Sunday to induce the girls to make.

Mrs. Morse saw with regret what an influence she had obtained over Nina, and it seemed an almost hopeless task to try to counteract it. Florence's reserved manner and unresponsiveness seemed to charm Nina into more devoted admiration instead of repelling her, and it cost her quite a struggle sometimes to carry out her resolve to treat the other scholars in the class with courtesy and consideration.

After a lapse of two or three Sundays Lois took her place again in the class, looking very pale and sad in her black dress; but the old repellant manner that had isolated her from all the

others in times past had vanished and a new gentleness had taken its place.

The sympathy that her classmates had shown her in her time of sorrow had softened her heart towards them, and she thanked them for their kindness in faltering tones that spoke of her emotion.

Nina forgot that Florence's eyes were upon her, and she clasped Lois' hand in a warm pressure that told of sympathy and affection, when she heard of Bertie's pleasure in the fruit she had sent him.

"If it were not for Florence!" Mrs. Morse found herself thinking again and again as she noticed how quickly a hardly perceptible frown of annoyance on her calm brow would check Nina in a glow of enthusiasm over the lesson, or how an earnest appeal would be unheeded because Florence would manage to distract the attention of the class in some apparently unintentional way.

She tried perseveringly to win the girl, but there were none of the signs that there had been in Lois' case that her patience would be rewarded with success, and so she put this scholar into God's keeping, feeling that her human love and wisdom could do nothing here, and that only the Spirit could soften this heart.

Even Florence's influence, however, was not

enough to crush out the germs of good that had taken root in Nina's heart and were beginning to spring up. New, earnest desires for something better than anything she had yet known were asserting themselves, and she did not try to banish them.

Mrs. Morse's influence was making itself felt in the class generally and she was very happy in her work of sowing seeds of good in these young hearts, and now that she felt assured that she had won their love, she eagerly looked forward to leading them by this human affection to the Saviour's love.

"Mrs. Morse, let me congratulate you on your success," Mr. Pearsall said one Sunday afternoon as he saw Nina exchange pleasant farewells with the other scholars as they separated at the door. "You have worked wonders in your class, for I had begun to think it was a hopeless task to attempt to bring those incongruous elements into harmony; yet I see it is accomplished."

"I feel very much blessed in my efforts," Mrs. Morse answered; "and with but a single exception I think the kindest feeling prevails among the girls. I have grown to love them dearly, even in the comparatively short time that I have been with them, and I feel that they return my affection. When love is mutual between a teach-

er and her class, then the work is easy. My first aim has always been to win the love of my scholars; when that is done, I feel that I can reach their hearts more effectually than through any appeal merely to their intellect."

"I am very glad that you were led to take that class," said Mr. Pearsall. "Our young men are getting along well with the doctor, and though I don't tell him so, I think it is as good a thing for him as for the boys to have charge of a class; but I am sure no one else could have done what you have with those girls."

Some one claimed his attention just then and he hastily excused himself, while Mrs. Morse gathered up her books and the maps with which she had been illustrating the lesson and joined her husband, who was awaiting her at the door.

It was her usual custom, every Sunday, to give each of her class a written question bearing upon the lesson for the following Sunday. The girls wrote the answers during the week and read them aloud in the class.

To-day she had given them sealed envelopes containing questions which, she told them, she wanted them to answer in writing for her to read on the following Sunday.

"I shall not read these answers aloud," she assured them, "but I want you to answer prayer-

fully and thoughtfully when you are alone by yourselves."

Mattie put the envelope in her Bible and did not think of it again until she was preparing for bed that evening. A white corner protruding from the leaves of the Bible recalled it to her mind, and taking it out she opened it and read the questions.

"Are you a Christian?"

That was the first question, and Mattie read it with a half-puzzled, half-startled expression on her face.

How was she to answer that question?

"I'm not a church member, if that's what she means, but she knows that already," she mused, as she let her thick, long hair fall about her shoulders and brushed with the vigor and energy which distinguished all of Mattie's movements.

"I am afraid I must write No to that question," she concluded after a few minutes' thought.

"Do you intend ever to become a Christian?"

That was the second question, and Mattie could glibly answer that.

"Of course I mean to be one some day. I mean to be a good deal better than I am now some day. I would n't want to die without being ready for it. It's awful enough to die when any-

body's good, and I would n't die the way I am now for anything."

"Why are you not a Christian now?" was the last question; and Mattie sat for a long time in quiet thought.

Why was she not a Christian? She knew the necessity for being one; she was not contented to live and die without any personal knowledge of the Saviour; she knew that there was nothing to prevent her from going to him just then and there in that quiet room. There was no reason to give for her delay. If she could not answer her teacher, how could she answer God if she should be suddenly called away before she had time to prepare for death and be asked that question?

"But I am young and strong. I may live for fifty years yet, and I have plenty of time to get ready to die," she argued to herself; but this argument could not satisfy her that it was right to delay.

Had she not known of girls even younger than she was who had died, some of them by accidents which left them no time for preparation?

In that prayerless family Mattie, even as a little child, had never been taught to utter a nightly prayer, and she had not the habit of prayer; but to-night she knelt down for a few minutes be-

fore she laid herself down beside her slumbering sister.

She did not know what to pray for, she did not even feel sure what it was that she wanted to ask; but somehow the attitude of prayer seemed to soothe in some measure the disquiet which filled her heart.

Her sleep was restless and disturbed that night. Even in her dreams those questions haunted her, and they were uppermost in her mind when she awoke in the early dawn, heavy-eyed and unrefreshed.

# CHAPTER XVII.

## UNREST.

"ARE you sick, Mattie?" asked her mother the next morning, as she noticed her daughter's unusual languor and silence.

"I don't feel like myself," admitted Mattie, "but I'm not sick. I didn't sleep well; that's all the trouble."

"I wish you could get a day off from the store and take a little rest," said her mother as she dished up the breakfast. "I know you can't feel well when you stand on your feet all day long from week in to week out. It worries me a good bit when I think about you, but I can't seem to see any help for it when we've got all these hungry mouths to fill;" and she looked reproachfully at the children, who were already in their places at the table clamoring loudly for their breakfast.

"There a' n't one too many of 'em, anyhow," Mattie said cheerily; "and don't you go to worrying about me, mother. I'm all right. I just got to puzzling over my Sunday-school lesson; that was all."

She had not much appetite for her breakfast after her unusual restlessness, but she forced herself to eat it, partly that her mother might not be uneasy about her during the day, for Mrs. Brown was a woman who, as her neighbors said, "set great store by worryin'," and partly because she knew that she would be sick and faint long before lunch-time if she started off without a good breakfast.

All day long the question followed her with a persistency that would not be baffled, "Why are you not a Christian?"

It was not strange that Mattie was not her usual bright, merry self when she was trying to find an answer that should satisfactorily dispose of that question, and her companions wondered at her unusual quietness and abstraction.

"You must be in love, Mattie," one of them said laughingly, and the others took up the jest.

"Who is it, Mattie?"

"Show us his picture, that 's a good girl."

But though Mattie took their bantering good-naturedly, they soon found that she was not in the mood for merriment and left her alone with her thoughts.

All day she went mechanically through the regular routine of her day's employment. She matched embroideries, took down box after box

patiently to satisfy capricious customers, and made out checks and counted out change as methodically as if her mind had not been filled with another matter.

For the first time she was disinclined to walk home with Etta and Nora, for she did not feel like joining in the talk and laughter which they always indulged in when work was over for the day; so, getting her hat, she slipped out of the store before they were ready to start.

"They 'll wonder what has become of me, but I 'll tell them to-morrow," she said to herself as she hastened along lest she should be overtaken.

The children's uproarious welcome diverted her somewhat from her perplexing thoughts, and she ate her supper with the hearty appetite of one who has worked hard. Her mother had a favorite dish prepared for her, and she appreciated this little attention that told of the mother-love that had been thinking of her while she was away.

While she was helping with the dishes Etta and Nora came in to reproach her laughingly with her desertion and persuade her to go with them for a walk.

"It will do you good," Nora urged, "and you do n't look like yourself to-day. There 's a new mission chapel going to be opened to-night; let 's go up and hear the music. If we do n't like it we

can slip out easy enough, for likely there'll be a crowd there."

Mattie would have declined going merely for a walk, but the idea of going to a religious service of any kind was attractive to her in her present frame of mind.

Still she lingered for a moment and looked at the sewing-machine with its pile of work ready for her to stitch.

"I ought to stay and do that sewing," she objected. "Mother, didn't you want me to do that to-night for you?"

"That can easily wait," answered her mother, smiling as Etta and Nora made signs of entreaty that Mattie might be allowed to come. "'T is n't often you take an evening off, and I 'd rather wait for the sewing than have you stay in and do it to-night. Put on your hat and go on with the girls, and maybe it'll do you good."

"Perhaps I can do the sewing after I come back, if we do n't stay long," Mattie said as she took off her apron and put on her hat; but her mother declared positively that she should n't touch a stitch of it that night, so she started feeling free to stay as long as she wanted to.

It was quite a walk to the new chapel, and the meeting had begun when the girls entered. The pews were all filled, and there were seats in

some of the aisles, so for a few moments they stood irresolute, half disposed to go out again.

An usher came to them while they stood undetermined and placed seats in the main aisle for them, and they followed him up towards the front of the church, feeling that all hope of retreat was cut off until the conclusion of the service, for even if they were tired of listening they could never face all that crowd of people and make their way out.

The singing was good, and a great wave of melody arose from the body of the church as the clear, sweet tones of a cornet led in a familiar tune.

It was a popular service intended especially to draw and interest people who were not habitual church-goers, but who might be led in by the singing or by curiosity. No part of the exercises was prolonged; the prayer was short, though so earnest in its petitions that many a heart felt that its needs were being presented before God; the reading of Scripture was brief, interspersed with explanatory comments, and plenty of singing made the service attractive.

The preacher was a young man who in his zeal for the Master's cause had consecrated himself to evangelistic labor in mission fields, instead of accepting a call to any well-established church,

where his eloquence could have commanded a good salary.

He announced his text, and as Mattie heard it her heart beat faster. Surely God had sent it to her as a message!

"Now is the accepted time."

Plainly and clearly, with the eloquence of perfect simplicity and burning love for souls, did the young preacher speak to this assembly of people who had come together on that one night, but might never come within sound of his voice again.

Many listened eagerly, some indifferently. To some it was like a cool spring of water in a thirsty land, to others a fable which had no claim upon their attention. But the message was delivered, and to one soul it brought conviction and an unrest that would not be banished until the peace that passeth understanding took its place.

It was not a long sermon; even the inattentive part of the congregation had not time to grow weary and listless; and then a short prayer followed.

"If there be any here who have not given their hearts freely and unreservedly to thee, O Christ, wilt thou not give them a terrible unrest, so that they may not find peace by day or by night until they find it in thy pardoning love?"

he prayed, and Mattie shivered as she listened to his words.

A terrible unrest! Was that what she was to have? Must she carry this aching heart, this disquieting alarm, about with her; must her days be filled with care and the quiet night-season with fear until she became a Christian? Surely that was what the prayer meant. The question repeated itself again and again, "Why are you not a Christian now?" and like an answer came the text, "*Now* is the accepted time."

There was no reason why she should not be a Christian now, every reason why she should. The matter had been clearly explained, and she had no room left for doubt or hesitation, yet she held back from Christ's offered pardon.

Why? Ah, why is it that we must all be urged and entreated and warned and commanded to seek our eternal salvation and happiness? Poor human nature, that passes a priceless boon unheeded because it is free to all!

The hymn rose clear and sweet about her, and the pathos of the words went straight home to Mattie's music-loving heart. "Almost persuaded." Yes, almost. It was hard for her to resist the pleadings of the Spirit which urged her to yield once for all to the Saviour, yet it was still harder for self-will to be dethroned.

When the benediction was pronounced she longed to linger and tell the minister her trouble, but timidity withheld her from carrying out her wish, although he announced that he would be glad to engage in religious conversation with any one who was interested in spiritual matters. So she carried her burden home with her.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MATTIE'S CONFLICT.

NORA and Etta could not understand Mattie's unusual disinclination to join in their merry chatter on the way home, and they were half offended until she said in a troubled voice,

"Girls, don't mind me to-night. I'm puzzling over something, and I'll tell you about it in a day or two. I can't say anything about it yet."

"Something gone wrong in the store?" Etta asked quickly.

But Mattie answered, "No; it's only about myself."

After that they asked her no more questions, but considerately talked in low tones and did not interrupt her thoughts.

After Nora bid the other two girls good night at the corner where she left them, Mattie and Etta walked on for a few minutes in silence, then Mattie asked abruptly,

"Etta, have you looked at your questions for next Sunday yet?"

"Yes; a' n't they strange questions?" was the

careless reply. "They have n't got anything to do with the lesson either, as far as I can see."

"Don't you think they are hard to answer?" Mattie asked after a pause.

"No; mine a' n't; but maybe they 're different from yours," answered Etta.

"Would you mind telling me what they were?" Mattie inquired.

"No; I'd just as lief tell you the questions, and the answers too, for that matter," Etta responded as the two girls paused in front of Mattie's door. "The first question is, if I am a Christian. That 's easy answered, for I a' n't, and I don't make believe to be. If I was I would n't behave myself as a good many members of the church do, anyhow. Then the second question was, when I meant to be a Christian. I am going to put 'When I get old' for the answer to that. And the last was, why a' n't I one now."

"What are you going to answer to that?" questioned Mattie, fairly trembling in her earnestness.

"I'm going to say, because I a' n't good enough," was Etta's glib response.

It was evident that the question had not impressed her as it had Mattie; and when the latter had bidden Etta good night and was toiling up

the steep stairs she half determined to treat the subject as lightly as her friend had.

But she soon found that she could not do this even if she would. She could not put aside this question without a definite, satisfactory answer.

"A terrible unrest." The words came back to her as she tossed sleeplessly on her pillow. It frightened her to think of that petition; it was so cruel to pray that such a dreadful thing might happen to any one.

Poor Mattie! It did not occur to her that that petition could be uttered in the tenderest love and pity, since the granting of it would sooner bring the tempest-tossed soul into the perfect peace of God's love. In her ignorance she looked back at her past indifference as peace, and did not realize that the striving of the Spirit, unhappy as it might make her for a time, was infinitely more to be desired than a dangerous lethargy.

Her past life rose before her black and sin-stained, and her burden rested heavily upon her. She groaned aloud in her distress, and the mother's listening ear caught the sound.

"What's the matter, child?" she asked, coming to the door. "Don't try to keep it back from me if you are in pain, but let me do something for you. Have you got one of your bad headaches coming on?"

"Oh, I wish that was all it was," sobbed Mattie. "It's something you can't help me with, mother. I've got to settle it myself."

"What is it?" questioned the mother in anxious bewilderment; nor was she much enlightened when Mattie sobbed forth the story of her trouble.

"You must be going to come down sick," she said decisively, "or you would n't work yourself up into such a worry as this. Of course, no one's perfect in this world; but I say you're pretty near it, and if your mother does n't know what kind of a girl you are, who should, I would like to know? Now you lay down and stop thinking and go to sleep, and if you do n't feel all right in the morning, why, go around and see Mrs. Morse to-morrow evening. She's good and kind and seems to be right fond of you, and I reckon she can set you all right."

"That's what I'll do, mother!" exclaimed Mattie eagerly. "I wonder I did n't think about it myself. She will know what to say to me."

The thought of going to that faithful friend for advice and help on the morrow quieted her immediate distress, and tired nature asserted her claims and refreshed the weary body by restful, dreamless slumber.

With the morning came a sense of her burden

again, and the mother watched her in wondering anxiety as she saw the grave, preoccupied look on the face that was usually so smiling.

"Well, Mattie child, I hope you 'll get over this that worries you so to-day, whatever it is," she said. "I do n't like to see you feeling this way."

"Maybe I 'll go and see Mrs. Morse before I come home," Mattie said as she bade her mother good-by. "She might go out somewhere if I waited to come home and change my dress first, and I would n't miss seeing her for anything. So do n't wait supper for me, mother, if I do n't come home at the right time."

"I 'll keep yours nice and hot for you, anyhow," her mother answered, "and you can do just as you like about going there first."

Mattie longed for evening to come and set her at liberty. She wanted to go to Mrs. Morse and tell that dear friend all her trouble. She would know just how to advise her and set her right; and whatever she told her to do should be done at once.

Wearily the hours dragged their slow length away. At lunch-time Mattie looked at the clock and wondered whether she could possibly go and see Mrs. Morse then instead of waiting until evening; but a few minutes' calculation of the num-

ber of blocks to be traversed in the limited time convinced her that it would be useless to attempt it. She must control her impatience and wait until the slow hands pointed to the hour of six.

The longest day must come to an end at last, and finally Mattie was at liberty. A party of the girls at her counter were going to a concert that evening and they begged her to join them; but she was surprised at herself to find how indifferent she was to the pleasure over which she would generally have grown enthusiastic. She pleaded a headache as an excuse for not going with them, and her pale face proved the truth of her words. Her head throbbed wearily with her perplexing thought, and her only desire was to reach some decision.

Mrs. Morse was surprised when, just as she was sitting down to tea that evening, the door-bell rang and Mattie was announced. Some swift intuition told her why Mattie had come to her, and attending to her husband's wants, she left her own supper untasted and hastened into the parlor.

She would hardly have recognized her scholar in the girl who sat there in an attitude of the deepest dejection, Mattie's quiet every-day dress was so different from her gay Sunday clothes, her high color had vanished, and the bright black

eyes were softened in their expression and told of the tears they had shed.

Mattie rose and went towards Mrs. Morse with outstretched hands that unconsciously made a touching gesture of appeal.

"My dear Mattie, I am so glad to see you," Mrs. Morse said warmly, taking the girl's hands in her own and greeting her with an affectionate kiss.

"What is the matter, dear?" she asked as Mattie's lips quivered and her face worked with emotion. "Sit down here beside me and tell me all about it," and she drew her down on the sofa.

The cordial greeting, the tone of loving sympathy, brought swift tears to Mattie's eyes, and though she tried to speak she could not command her voice for a few moments.

"O Mrs. Morse," she sobbed at last, "I am so miserable!"

"What makes you miserable, Mattie?" her teacher asked gently.

"Those questions you gave me last Sunday," Mattie answered. "I can't answer them, and I keep thinking about them all the time. I do want to be a Christian, and yet I am afraid. What shall I do?" and her voice faltered. "Something keeps me back, I don't know what; and yet I

dare n't wait till I get old, to be good, for fear I might die without being ready for it."

"Have you prayed about your trouble, Mattie?" Mrs. Morse asked.

Mattie shook her head. "No; I do n't know just what I want. I only know that I am perfectly miserable. I do n't think I know how to pray, Mrs. Morse. Oh, wont you pray for me?"

Gladly Mrs. Morse assented, and in simple language carried Mattie's burden of sin and her longing to be free from it before the throne of grace; and Mattie, kneeling beside her, felt that somehow her heavy heart grew lighter as its sorrow was laid at the Saviour's feet.

Then Mrs. Morse had a long, loving conversation with her, trying to clear away all difficulties and make the path plain before Mattie. Though she sympathized with her distress, yet her heart rejoiced in the knowledge that she had been brought to the solemn consideration of the question of personal salvation, and she felt that Mattie was too much in earnest to leave the matter undecided.

Mr. Morse heard the low, earnest tones, and wondered whether his wife was already beginning to reap the harvest from the seed she had so prayerfully and patiently sown in such apparently sterile soil. It was fully an hour before he heard

the hall-door open and close as the visitor departed, and Mrs. Morse returned to the dining-room.

Her face was bright and her voice grew tremulous with earnestness as she told him of her hope that Mattie would soon be enabled to make a final surrender of herself to God.

She had prayed so long and earnestly for the loved members of her class that she rejoiced greatly in any indications that they were themselves concerned about the welfare of their souls, and many times during that evening and the succeeding days did she offer earnest petitions that Mattie's conflict might soon end in joyful surrender.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### PEACE.

MATTIE felt as if she had left the heaviest part of her burden behind her when she said good-by to Mrs. Morse and went out into the quiet starlit evening. The struggle was not yet over, but she was determined to decide for Jesus, and the knowledge that she had decided for the right brought her comparative peace.

She hastened homeward, fearing that her mother might be uneasy at her prolonged absence. She was not surprised, when she turned the corner of the street, to see her mother on the doorstep with Nan in her arms, anxiously watching for her.

"I'd begun to think you were lost, for sure," she said when Mattie reached her. "I suppose you've been to see your teacher, and that's what kept you so long," she added interrogatively as she saw traces of recent tears on Mattie's face.

Mattie nodded assent and held out her arms for Nan, who sprang into them joyously.

"I've been keeping your supper hot on the back of the stove, but I'm afraid it wont be good

for much, it's waited so long," the mother went on as she led the way up stairs.

She bustled about with affectionate solicitude, putting Mattie's supper on the table for her and insisting upon making a fresh cup of tea; but there was something in her daughter's grave, quiet face that restrained her from asking any questions as to the result of her visit to Mrs. Morse.

Though she had never had a serious impression in her life, nor known what it was to have a moment's uneasiness concerning her soul's welfare, yet she somehow dimly realized that Mattie's anxiety was not an imaginary trouble that she could be talked out of, but something that must be thoughtfully settled.

With unusual delicacy she did not say anything in the way of rough consolation, nor did she attempt to cheer Mattie up by telling her any of the neighborhood news, but let her eat her supper quietly, only showing her sympathy by demonstrative kindness.

Mattie was glad that Etta and Nora were going to the concert, for she did not feel like seeing any one. Her great desire was to be alone and decide the question that had troubled her so sorely.

Taking Nan in her arms when she had fin-

ished her supper, she went into the little bedroom that she shared with a younger sister and prepared the child for bed.

When this task was completed without the frolic which usually accompanied it, she gathered up the little white-robed figure in her arms and rocked her to sleep.

Her sad thoughts came back to her as she sat there watching the heavy eyelids droop over the sleepy brown eyes, and she felt herself drifting back into the perplexity and doubt which had been so hard to bear.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself as tears filled her eyes. "I am not fit to be a Christian; I am too wicked."

Then Mrs. Morse's words came back to her:

"'All the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of him.' Go to him just as you are, and he will accept you with all your sins. You only show your distrust by trying to make yourself worthy."

Gently laying the sleeping child in the bed, Mattie knelt down beside her, and the first earnest prayer in her life went up to heaven in a heart-cry: "O God, I give myself to thee. Take me just as I am, with all my sins, and forgive me for Jesus' sake."

Nothing was kept back from the Master. If

he would only take her, sinful and unworthy as she felt herself to be, how gladly she would give her whole life to him!

Even while she knelt there, tears of contrition filling her eyes as she realized how great was the burden of sin she brought to the Saviour, a sense of peace and pardon filled her heart and she realized the joy of acceptance. Her burden rolled from her shoulders and a new happiness took possession of her. Tears still glistened in her eyes, but they were no longer tears of sorrow.

"It was so easy," she thought to herself. "Just as soon as I gave myself to Jesus he took me, and yet I have been thinking it was something so hard to be a Christian."

Long she knelt there, so happy in her newfound peace that she wondered whether it could really have been herself who had been so unhappy but a little time before.

"I must tell mother," she said to herself. "How I wish she loved Jesus too!" And stepping softly, lest she should disturb the sleeping child, she went out into the other room where her mother sat with folded hands, snatching a few moments of rest after her long day of work before the children should come in from their games in the street and her husband from his lounge on the doorstep.

Mattie crossed the room and put her arms around her mother's neck, while her bright face told the story of her peace even before her lips uttered it.

"Mother dear, it is all right now," she said as her mother looked up in surprise. "I think Jesus has forgiven all my sins, and I have given myself to him. My trouble is all over."

"I'm glad."

That was all the mother said, but her unwonted caress was more eloquent than her words. She felt strangely shy of her daughter just now. Some change, some experience, had come to her of which she herself knew nothing, and Mattie's subdued joy awed her.

"Mattie's a good girl," she said to herself when she was alone again. "If I do say it that should n't, I do n't know of anybody else that has as good a daughter as she is to me, and it frightens me to hear her talking so about her sins. Why, she a' n't ever done anything much out of the way. If she thinks she has so much to be forgiven her, what must I be? Well, I'm glad she a' n't worrying any more. I guess Mrs. Morse knew how to make things seem right to her, for she's a good woman, I do believe, if there ever was one. I 'spose Mattie's got religion, but I do n't see how it can make her much

better, though that's what folks says it always does. I wonder what it seems like. Mattie certainly looked as if she never felt so glad about anything."

Whatever Mattie was so deeply interested in could not but concern the mother who was so devoted to her, and so it happened that in the days that followed she often pondered on subjects which hitherto she had left unheeded.

## CHAPTER XX.

### NINA'S DECISION.

NINA had not forgotten her promise to Mrs. Morse on the afternoon of Bertie's funeral, but, like many another, she had put the question away from her, to be settled at a more convenient time.

The sense of unrest and dissatisfaction with herself and her life that had possessed her for a short time after she had looked upon death vanished by slow degrees and left her indifferent and happy again; and so, beyond a vague desire to please Mrs. Morse by doing as she had wished her to, she had no care for her soul's welfare.

But the questions her teacher had given her to answer aroused her interest again.

"How I wish I could answer them in a way that would please dear Mrs. Morse!" she said to herself; and following that wish came a faint little flickering desire to know for herself something of the peace and joy of which her teacher had told her. So faint and feeble was this aspiration after a better and higher life that it seemed as if a breath would extinguish it. There was

nothing in the young girl's gay and worldly surroundings to foster such a feeling. If she had spoken of it to her mother, she would have been told that it was "a foolish, morbid consciousness of self." Her father would have laughed at her and called her a fanciful little puss. To mere human calculation it would have seemed well nigh impossible for the good seed to spring up in a soil that was so prepared to choke with its thorns the first tender shoots of good.

But there was an unseen influence at work for good far more powerful than any that could be exerted against it. Daily, oftentimes almost hourly, Mrs. Morse's earnest prayers ascended in behalf of this loved scholar, seeking to obtain a blessing for her; and prayer is a lever that can raise any burden to the throne of grace.

So this faint aspiration strengthened hourly until it became an earnest desire, a longing after God.

When on Wednesday evening the bell sounded its call to the weekly prayer-meeting, Nina astonished her mother by announcing her intention to go; and so strong was her desire that not even her mother's surprise at what she termed "an unreasonable freak" weakened her purpose.

"You can't go by yourself," her mother said conclusively, as if this argument settled the ques-

tion; "it is altogether too dusky for you to go out alone."

"O mother!" and Nina's face showed her disappointment so plainly that her father, catching a glimpse of it as he turned the leaves of his evening newspaper, felt his determination not to go out that evening growing weak.

"Never mind, puss," he said, laying down his paper when he saw the blue eyes growing misty with tears. "I'll see you around to the church, and I will come back again that way in an hour's time and bring you home again. Hurry up and get your hat, or you'll be late."

Nina's face grew bright again, and her happy smile repaid her father quite as much as her words of thanks.

"Wont you come in too, father?" she asked as they reached the church door just as the bell ceased.

"No; I've done my duty for one night by leaving my slippers and paper to gratify your new fancy for prayer-meetings," her father answered with a smile as he left her; and so Nina went in alone, little knowing that she had been led there to make a decision that night that would affect her whole after life.

She wondered whether it was because of her unusual frame of mind that the meeting seemed

so deeply impressive and solemn. Two or three times before she had attended this weekly service and had yawned wearily through it, each time resolving never to come again; but to-night she listened eagerly to every word.

The subject was "The Love of Christ," and Mr. Morse was moved to even greater earnestness than usual as he dwelt upon this great soul-inspiring theme. He pictured in eloquent words the infinite, pitying love that brought the Lord of glory to this world to suffer and die for his enemies. Then he told them of the picture where the thorn-crowned Saviour knocks patiently at the door overgrown with weeds and clinging ivy tendrils. He could stand outside and knock, but he would not enter the door unless it was opened to him.

"And this is a true picture of our hearts," he went on. "They must be opened to admit the Saviour, or, with all his infinite love and compassion, he will not enter them. I fear he has waited long years for some hearts to open to Him. He has waited in patient love through the heat of noonday sun and the dews of night, thinking, 'Some of them may yet hear my voice.' Must he wait in vain? Must even his long-suffering meet with no return? 'Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.' Is that his sorrowful

cry as he turns away at last for ever from the heart that will not give entrance to its Saviour?"

Nina had always known in a general way that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" but this evening she listened to it as to a new and living truth. Had she been keeping the door of her heart fast closed when such an infinitely loving Saviour asked to enter?

Not all the threatenings or terrors of the law could have touched her as deeply as did this picture of patient love; and she opened the door of her heart gladly to admit the Saviour.

When Mr. Morse had given out the concluding hymn he was moved by a strong impulse to say,

"Dear friends, I feel that there must be some here to-night who want to yield to their Saviour and accept his matchless love and pardon. Surely you cannot grieve him by longer delay when even now he is knocking. If there are any present who have taken this new resolve, will they make it known to us by rising during the singing of the last verse of this hymn, that we may unite in earnest prayer for them?"

It was an unusual request, and notwithstanding the tender solemnity of the meeting, some

wondered at it. They thought there had not been interest enough manifested to justify such a request.

The sweet tones of the organ filled the room and the hymn began:

"Knocking, knocking, who is there?
Waiting, waiting, oh, how fair!
'T is a Pilgrim, strange and kingly;
Never such was seen before:
Ah, my soul, for such a wonder
Wilt thou not undo the door?"

The sweet, pathetic words stirred long-sealed springs of feeling in many a heart, and Nina's voice was tremulous as she softly joined in the next verse:

"But the door is hard to open,
For the weeds and ivy-vine,
With their dark and clinging tendrils,
Ever round the hinges twine."

There was no longer any doubt or hesitancy in her mind, but even at this supreme moment, when her heart was full of new-born love to the Saviour, she found it hard to confess him openly.

If she did not accept Mr. Morse's invitation to make her new desires known by rising, she felt that she would be dishonoring her new Master by refusing to admit her resolve to serve him; yet self held her back with eager arguments.

"Don't make yourself unnecessarily conspic-

uous. It will do just as well to tell Mr. Morse afterwards. All these people need not know it."

But Nina crushed back these selfish promptings bravely, and as the first line of the last verse was begun she rose to her feet, trembling with her effort, but determined to confess her love for Christ.

As she stood there she forgot the people about her, the wondering looks that she might receive, and all her heart was filled to overflowing with the sweet, glad consciousness that the long-closed door had not been opened in vain, but the Saviour had entered.

And she was not alone. Mattie, with a face that betokened the peace that filled her heart, rose with her. It was not the trial to her that it was to Nina, but on the contrary she was glad of the opportunity to publicly own her Saviour. She was so much more independent in her disposition than Nina, who generally looked to some one else for guidance, that it cost her no effort to take this step, as she supposed, alone, for she could not see Nina from her position without turning.

Then, too, the people were almost all strangers to Mattie, and she was indifferent to their opinion, while Nina dreaded the comment of friends and acquaintances with all her sensitive nature.

Very earnest and loving was Mr. Morse's closing prayer as he asked that these young servants might have grace to persevere in their new life and be continually strengthened in their resolve to give themselves to their Saviour.

One who was present rejoiced in their happiness with a joy as great as their own. Mrs. Morse's heart sang a glad thanksgiving as she realized that two of the precious souls that had been committed to her care were safe.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### OPPOSITION.

It had not occurred to Nina that her mother or father would make the slightest objection to her new hope and resolutions, and she looked forward joyfully to telling them what she had done that evening.

She saw her father waiting for her by the door at the conclusion of the meeting, and as soon as she had received a warm hand-clasp from her pastor, with a few earnest words of encouragement, and had returned Mrs. Morse's warm embrace, she went down to where her father was standing with so glad an expression on her face that he could not help noticing it and silently wondering if it could be possible that anything in the prayer-meeting had brought it there.

"Father dear, I want to tell you something," Nina began half shyly as they started towards home.

"Well, puss, what is it?" her father asked kindly, pressing the little gloved hand that rested on his arm.

"I have just begun to love Jesus to-night,

father, and I want to thank you so much for bringing me to the prayer-meeting. If I had not come, I might never have found out what a precious Saviour he is."

There was no reluctance or half-heartedness in Nina's tones. She spoke as joyfully and freely of her new love and happiness as if it had been some coveted earthly possession she had just gained.

Mr. Maynard started as he listened. He was wont to say laughingly that nothing that Nina could do would surprise him, he was so used to her capricious impulses; but he was genuinely surprised at her words.

Was this his Nina, who to his knowledge had never had a serious thought in her life, that was talking so earnestly about her love for Jesus?

In the worldly, irreligious life that he led this was a strange language, almost as incomprehensible as if some one from a foreign land had uttered it; but it carried him back to days when he had listened to his mother's teachings and believed in them.

Jesus had been a familiar, revered name to him in those boyish days, and far away from the kingdom as he had strayed since then, he had never grown so hardened as to sneer at what his mother had held sacred.

He was recalled from these thoughts by Nina's disappointed tones.

"Father, I thought you would be so glad for me."

"I am, my darling," he answered tenderly. "You made me think of your dear grandmother just then. She was a good woman, Nina, and I could ask nothing better for you than that your life might be like hers. I believe with all my heart in such religion as hers was; there was nothing insincere or half-hearted in it. I suppose people now-a-days would call her too strait-laced and Puritanical, but that's the only religion I believe in. I have no patience with this sham that people put on when they go to church and then do as they please all the rest of the time. Stick to your colors, whatever you do, Nina, or else let the whole thing alone. I have seen church members that keep more people out of the church by their inconsistencies and shams than they could ever get in, and I don't want you to be one of that kind."

"I hope I wont be," Nina answered, a sense of the responsibilities of a Christian beginning to dawn upon her as she listened to her father.

His sympathy and encouragement had made her glad heart still happier, and when she entered the house she went at once to her mo-

ther's room, eager to share her happiness with her.

"Mamma dear," she said, throwing her arms impulsively about her mother's neck when she found her at last up in her room, "I want to tell you about the prayer-meeting to-night."

But Mrs. Maynard was annoyed at the persistence with which Nina had begged to go and at her father for encouraging her in her wilful whim by taking her; so with a coldness that she rarely showed towards her daughter, though it was her habitual manner with others, she unclasped the clinging arms, saying,

"Don't, Nina. I am not at all interested in the prayer-meeting, and I don't wish to hear anything about it. I was surprised at your insisting so upon going when you knew what my wishes were; now let this be the last of it."

For a moment Nina felt chilled and rebuffed; but she was too eager to tell her mother what she had done to be thus silenced.

"I want to tell you something about myself, then," she said very gently, still kneeling beside her mother. "To-night, when Mr. Morse asked those who wanted to give their hearts to Jesus to rise, I stood up; and I do love Him, mamma."

"Nina Maynard!"

It would be impossible to give you an idea of

the tone of mingled anger and astonishment in which these words were uttered; and Nina, looking up in dismay, saw that her mother's face was flushed with passion and that she was looking at her with a sterner expression than she had ever seen her wear.

"Mamma, don't look so at me!" Nina cried, trying to hide her face on her mother's shoulder; but Mrs. Maynard pushed her away from her so decidedly that she was afraid to try to soften her resentment by caresses.

For once in her life Mrs. Maynard was seriously angry with Nina, and she made no effort to conceal her displeasure. Not even the sight of Nina's tears softened her angry mood, and she vented her annoyance in a stream of passionate reproaches.

"You might at least have considered it worth while to consult your father and me before you did such a thing," she said.

"But, mamma, I did not know I was going to do it," Nina pleaded. "I was unhappy about myself and I wanted to go to the prayer-meeting; and then I never thought you would be anything but glad."

"If you had considered the matter a little, instead of acting in your usual hasty way, you might have known that I should not be glad to

see a daughter of mine making herself so conspicuous. I declare I don't know what to think of you, Nina. I am so mortified that I feel as if I never cared to enter the doors of that church again. What do you suppose people thought of you? They could not surely give you credit for the least modesty or delicacy of feeling."

Mrs. Maynard entirely forget the innumerable times when Nina had made herself far more conspicuous with her mother's full approval and consent.

She had taken part in a concert not a year since that had been given for the benefit of the church, and during her piano performance she had been very markedly conspicuous. But a few months before she had taken one of the leading parts in an amateur dramatic entertainment, and Mrs. Maynard had felt nothing but motherly pride at the attention she had attracted by her pretty face and good acting.

But to-night she was shocked and mortified beyond expression because her daughter had made herself conspicuous by rising in a little group of Christians to confess her love for Christ. Yes, she was inconsistent in her anger, I grant you; but, unfortunately, inconsistency in such matters is no unusual thing.

"Who else, may I ask, had little enough deli-

cacy to take part in this performance?" Mrs. Maynard asked in her most scathing tones, pausing in her angry pacing up and down the room.

It was no wonder that Nina felt as if she could not answer the question. She knew too well what an outburst of scorn and wrath would follow the announcement of Mattie's name, for her mother did not share her kindlier feelings towards her classmates. She cowered a little as her mother paused before her and repeated the question.

In faltering tones the answer came, "Mattie Brown."

This brought Mrs. Maynard's wrath to a climax, and Nina wept bitter tears as she listened to the torrent of reproaches. She had often seen her mother angry with others and had heard outbursts of passion that had frightened her, but never before in all her petted life had such words been used to her.

Two or three times she tried to stay her mother's indignation and make her peace with her again, but she was angrily repulsed each time.

It was with a feeling of relief that she received her dismissal to her room for the night, though her heart was sore at being refused the good-night kiss for which she held up her quivering lips.

"I am too angry to want even to look at you to-night," Mrs. Maynard said; and so the poor

Mrs. Morse's Girls. Page 181.

child crept away to her room to sob out her grief on her pillow until it was wet with her tears.

Had she done wrong? she asked herself, so beset with grief and anxiety as to forget her new happiness. Surely not; and unhappy as she was at her mother's anger, her heart told her that she would not undo her evening's work if she could.

Down stairs much the same scene had taken place between husband and wife. When Mrs. Maynard had banished the weeping Nina to her room she went down stairs in search of her husband. He had heard her angry voice, and though his sympathy was with Nina, yet he made the politic resolve not to take sides openly with either his wife or his daughter, if he could avoid it.

"Do you know what Nina did to-night?" Mrs. Maynard asked as she swept into the room where he was trying to read.

"Yes," he answered briefly, without raising his eyes from his paper.

"What did you say to her?" she demanded.

Mr. Maynard fidgeted uneasily in his chair at this question, took off his glasses, and wiped them carefully before he answered. "Well, my dear, I see you are annoyed about it, so I hardly can expect you to approve of what I have done. I told her I was glad of it and I hoped she would stick to her colors."

"You did?"

The indignant emphasis made it very clear to Mr. Maynard that Mrs. Maynard did not at all approve of the encouragement he had given Nina, and he was fully prepared for the curtain lecture that followed.

He rarely asserted himself, and upon most occasions Mrs. Maynard demanded and obtained her own way; now, though he would fain have put in a plea for Nina, he found it would be useless and unwise to make the attempt; so for the time he listened meekly to his wife's expostulations.

# CHAPTER XXII.

## KEEPING THE FAITH.

NINA sobbed herself to sleep that night, and when she awoke in the morning her first consciousness was that something had happened.

In a moment the events of the preceding evening flashed into her memory. First she remembered only the joy that had attended her mute avowal of her love for her Saviour; but then came the remembrance of her mother's anger and reproaches.

She was only a child, so it is not strange that the feeling of her disgrace overclouded the brightness of her joy. Her head ached with the excitement and grief of the night before, and so it happened that the first day of her new life dawned sadly.

She wondered to herself whether her mother's anger would not be somewhat calmed down after her night's rest, and whether she would not really rejoice a little with her at the gladness that her last night's resolution had brought to her.

She would have been dismayed if she had

known of her mother's plan to discourage her in her new life.

Early that morning, before Nina's friend Florence was up, a note from Mrs. Maynard was brought to her, and as her eyes glanced over the contents a smile of complacent self-satisfaction lit up her face. There was nothing that Florence more dearly loved than to have her influence over others recognized, and Mrs. Maynard had done this in a way that gratified her pride exceedingly.

She told Florence of what she was pleased to term Nina's impulsive folly, and begged her to exert her influence over her friend to win her away from her new feelings and determination.

"I know she will yield to your influence," the mother wrote. "If you are firm in opposing her I am sure she will not persist in conduct so contrary to all our wishes. I have expressed myself very decidedly in the matter, though her father, I regret to say, encouraged her. I will now leave her to you, for her affection and admiration for you are so great that you can easily manage her."

Nothing could have delighted Forence more than this concession to her power, and sitting down to her desk she wrote a graceful note to Mrs. Maynard, promising to do all she could to carry out that lady's wishes.

To do her justice, Mrs. Maynard knew nothing

of the treasure of which she sought to deprive Nina. For religion, as embodied in church-going and a reasonable attention to all outward forms, she had great respect, and considered that she had always done her duty by taking a pew and occupying it once a day.

But for religion that becomes a vital part of life itself, and that finds expression in Christlike words and deeds, she had a profound contempt; and strange as it may seem, she really considered that it was her duty to check Nina in any such impulse.

Florence determined not to delay in using the influence which was to mould Nina to her mother's will, and glancing at the clock saw that she would have time to make a short call before school began.

Nina, heavy-eyed and languid, had just finished her breakfast when Florence was ushered in, and she sprang up with a cry of welcome as she saw her friend.

Her father had gone down town to business before she was awake, and though her mother had not made any allusion to the previous evening, her manner assured Nina that she was still under her displeasure; so she felt lonely and miserable.

Florence returned her greeting with more cordiality than she usually showed, for she knew

Nina well enough to be aware that she could be more easily led by affection than by remonstrance.

"Have you finished breakfast?" she asked. "I came over to have a little talk with you. Suppose we go up to your room."

Nina gladly assented, and with her arm about her friend they went up stairs.

"I have something to talk to you about too," Nina said as they entered the room and seated themselves on the pretty little sofa.

But Florence knew what Nina's subject for conversation was, and she preferred to approach the matter from her own standpoint.

"I am going to scold you a little bit," she began kindly as Nina rested her aching head lovingly on her shoulder and caressed her friend's hand. "Do you know, I have heard already of what a crazy thing you did last night? I think I shall have to take care of you after this and go with you when you go to prayer-meetings, so as to keep you from yielding to your impulses. You are such a child, Nina;" and Florence looked down pityingly on her friend from the heights of perfect self-satisfaction.

Certainly no one ever had an opportunity to accuse her of impulse, and she prided herself on the perfect self-control and calculating foresight, so unnatural in one of her age, which made her

infinitely less lovable than Nina, with all the mistakes into which her hastiness sometimes led her.

Nina's cheeks flushed crimson as she listened to her friend's words, and it was a proof how strong a hold her new love had taken upon her heart that no thought of denying it, or even excusing herself for it, entered her mind.

"I wish you would always go with me, Florence," she answered after a brief pause. "Not that I want you to keep me from doing what I believe to be right, but so that you may know for yourself what happiness I have found."

Florence was surprised at Nina's answer. It was almost an unheard of thing for her to persist in any opinion that differed from Florence's, and either silence or apologetic words had been all that she had expected.

"Nina, I quite admire your effort to persist in a step you took when you were too excited to know what you were doing," she said. "But still it would please me much more to hear you admit that it was a mistake on your part—we all make mistakes sometimes, you know—and that you mean to undo it as much as possible. I suppose everybody in church has heard some version of the story, but we can easily explain to them how natural it is for you to act on impulse, and

they will not think any more about it, unless, indeed, you should give them fresh occasion."

Blunt, independent Mattie would have laughed at the idea of caring for other people's opinions in a matter which concerned herself only, but Nina shrank like a sensitive plant from a rough touch as she listened to the apparently kind words which Florence well knew would wound her sorely.

There was nothing that Nina dreaded more than to be the subject of comment and criticism, and though her innate good sense told her that she had done nothing to outrage the most scrupulous notions of propriety, yet the freely-expressed opinions of her mother and Florence were not without their influence.

It was very hard, perhaps the hardest thing she had ever done in her life, to uphold her conduct and justify herself. It would have been hard in any case, but her love and admiration for Florence made her task a doubly difficult one. Still the same impulse that had urged her to her feet the evening before prompted her to speak bravely now.

"It was not a mistake, Florence," she said quietly. "I am very glad that I went to the prayer-meeting last night and that I was influenced to do as I did. I am sure I shall be glad of it all my life. The only thing I am sorry for is

that mamma is so angry with me about it, and I know you think as she does—"

"You know that I am very fond of you, Nina," interposed Florence, "but I cannot help fully agreeing with your mother that last night your impulse ran away with your good sense and led you to do a very conspicuous and unladylike thing. When you have time to think about it, you will see the matter in that light yourself. Why, I should think the very fact that such a girl as that Mattie Brown was the only one who joined you would be sufficient to show you your mistake. No one could uphold you in such a thing, and I am disappointed in you, I must confess."

This latter remark Florence had made several times with great effect when some of her submissive admirers at school became refractory; but this time it failed to have its usual result.

"I am disappointed too," Nina said sadly as two great tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. "I thought you would sympathize with me and be my friend more than ever just now, but you are only trying to make things harder for me. Florence, if for one little minute you could know what a happy, perfectly contented feeling it gives you to love Jesus, I know you would love him always, even if every one else you love turned away from you for it. You know how I love you,

dear; but though I can't bear to disappoint you in any way, I must tell you that I shall never give up my love for Jesus to please even you. Why, I could n't if I wanted to," she added earnestly, as she realized that it was a part of herself now.

The clock on the mantel chimed the quarter-hour and Florence glanced at it. She withdrew herself coldly from Nina and gathered up her books.

"Do n't go yet," Nina pleaded, hoping that she could win Florence to sympathy with her.

"I certainly am not enjoying this conversation enough to stay longer," Florence answered, "and while you are in this frame of mind I cannot hope that you will listen to reason. Nina, you have often professed to love me; now I will put your affection to a test. If you love me, give up these foolish notions. If you will not, I shall know that you do not care anything for me or my friendship. Now decide, once for all."

Not a hard matter to decide between the selfish affection of such a friend and the peace of Jesus; and yet Nina's love for her friend was so strong that, while she had no thought of deciding in any way but the one she had chosen the night before, yet it cost her a heartache to say the words that would alienate her friend from her.

"I have decided once for all," she answered

falteringly, yet with a decision in her trembling voice that Florence could not help feeling would resist all her boasted influence.

"Then our friendship is at an end," she said haughtily, and gathering up her books, she swept out of the room without vouchsafing another word or look in Nina's direction.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HELP.

WHEN Nina found herself alone and heard the hall door close after her visitor she threw herself upon the bed in a burst of grief. How could she bear estrangement from Florence, her dearest friend? and she knew that Florence would not relent unless she would promise to give up whatever displeased her.

"Not even for her sake could I give this up," she whispered to herself, though it seemed to her as if it had estranged all her friends from her.

Her new path looked very rough just then, and she would have been surprised if she had been told how quickly all the difficulties which loomed up before her would vanish.

She was too miserable to care to go to school, and as her attendance had always been regulated by her own inclinations, she felt at liberty to stay at home and rest her throbbing head on the cool pillow.

Mrs. Maynard had gone out on a shopping expedition, so Nina was left alone with her thoughts, as her mother had intended that she should be,

hoping that she would find her disgrace unbearable and become as yielding as she had hitherto been.

About eleven o'clock Nina heard her father's step in the hall and rushed eagerly down to meet him, forgetting her headache and loneliness in her delighted surprise.

"Why, what's the matter with my little girl?" he asked lovingly as he noticed her dark-ringed eyes and flushed cheeks.

"My head aches," Nina answered, nestling her head on his shoulder as he sat down in a large easy-chair and drew her down upon his knee.

"O father, I'm so glad you are not angry with me too!" she went on with a little quiver in her voice as he caressed the golden head with a tender, fatherly touch.

"Why, who is angry at you?" he asked.

"Mamma and Florence," she answered sadly.

"Don't you mind any of that girl's nonsense," said Mr. Maynard with disrespect that would have shocked Florence if she could have heard his slighting mention. "She isn't worth minding; and as to your mother—well, she was put out last night, but she'll soon be over it, I'll engage. Did she say anything to you about it this morning?"

"No; but she wasn't like herself," Nina answered.

"Well, she wont mention it again, and she'll be all right in a day or two," said Mr. Maynard with a mental resolution to verify his words by an interview with his wife, in which he proposed to tell her that for once his wishes should be respected and Nina should not be interfered with in any way.

"Suppose I turn preacher for a little while and preach you a sermon, Nina?" he went on presently. "I'm no Christian myself, girlie, but I know something of the kind of life a Christian has to lead, and I can tell you it's not an easy one by any means. You haven't chosen something that is going to bring you nothing but happiness and sunshine; you've got to meet a good many trials of one kind or another and make a good many sacrifices; but if you think you've got something that more than makes up for all these troubles it brings with it, why, then take them bravely and don't let them make you miserable. I'll help you all I can, darling, and your life will soon prove to others how much your religion is worth. No one that knew your grandmother could doubt the worth of her religion, for she just lived it in her every-day life; but there are not many like her, or this would be a better world."

This was strange advice to come from the lips of a man who often professed his indifference to

religion and his ability to live without it; but, inconsistent as it seemed, he was not willing that Nina's life should resemble his in this respect; and now that she had taken the first step in a new and better life, he was anxious to encourage her in it, and if possible to remove all obstacles from her path.

Mrs. Maynard's step was heard at the door, and Mr. Maynard said to Nina as he rose,

"You run up stairs a little while, Nina; I want to have a talk with your mother."

Nina was glad to escape, and ran lightly up stairs to her room, feeling much happier than she had done before her father's return.

She wondered what had brought him home from his business at that unusual hour in the morning, but she little suspected that his uneasiness about her had made him leave his desk and come up town to see whether she stood in need of any comfort or encouragement.

"The child is n't used to being opposed," he said to himself, "and likely her mother has been pretty hard on her. If she is still determined to make Nina give up, I 'll interfere myself and put a stop to it. The child shall have her way in this."

Accordingly, when Mrs. Maynard entered the parlor she was surprised to find her husband there

awaiting her with the air of determination that always meant that he intended to have his own way.

A long altercation ensued as soon as he broached the subject, but it resulted in her final promise not to discourage Nina in any way, nor to interfere with her wishes even if she should choose to join the church.

Realizing that her husband was in earnest, Mrs. Maynard made a virtue of necessity, and promised to say no more; so Mr. Maynard took the next car down town, feeling assured that he had lightened Nina's troubles and made things as easy as he could for her.

A few moments spent in quiet reflection convinced Mrs. Maynard that she had been unnecessarily severe with Nina, and she acknowledged to herself that she could probably have accomplished her object far more effectually by kindness.

If Nina was rightly managed there need be no reason why her new ideas should make her peculiar and straitlaced. Indeed, she recalled several brilliant society ladies whose life she would be only too glad to have Nina imitate, who were church members in good and regular standing. They had discovered the very minimum of Christian living, but that was what excited Mrs. Maynard's admiration.

As she started up stairs she heard Nina gently close her door, and it brought a swift pang of remorse for her anger of the night before when she found that her dearly loved daughter shrank from her.

"Nina!" she called as she reached the top of the stairs, and something in the tones of her voice made Nina rush to her and throw her arms about her in a long, clinging embrace.

No allusion was made to Mrs. Maynard's words of the evening before, but a tacit reconciliation took place, and Nina's loving heart grew light again. Only the thought of Florence's anger left a shadow, but Nina clung to the hope that she might perhaps change her mind.

"If I had only done something wrong or injured her in any way, I believe I should be glad," thought Nina, "for then I could ask her to forgive me; but I haven't done anything wrong, so I can't do anything except beg her to make up."

Mattie would have been surprised if she had been told that her Christian life had begun far more joyously than Nina's. She could never associate sorrow or disappointment of any kind with one who seemed to have everything to make her happy that heart could wish or love devise; and though the old feeling of bitter jealousy had gone, yet she could not help envying Nina a little some-

times when her own busy life was unusually trying.

True, Mattie had no home influence to help her in the Christian life she had undertaken, but then no hindrances were put in her way. Her father and mother rejoiced because she did in her new hope, and they were anxious to help her in any way they could; so she enjoyed a sympathy that Nina lacked.

Mrs. Morse had foreseen that Mattie, with her sturdy independence of character and the self-assertion that made her a leader among her companions, would make an earnest and useful Christian; and far from feeling that her work with Mattie was all accomplished, she looked forward to training her to be an efficient and consecrated Christian worker.

She could easily imagine the trials that would beset Nina, for the slight acquaintance she already had with Mrs. Maynard had been quite sufficient to let her know that that lady looked with little favor upon such a step as her daughter had taken, and would doubtless oppose her, while Florence's influence would not be for the right.

All the more earnestly, because so convinced that no human love could make an entrance into that hardened heart, completely cased in pride and selfishness, did Mrs. Morse pray for this

scholar that God might soften her by his love and subdue her proud will to his own.

She was very hopeful of Etta and Nora now, for she knew that Mattie's influence over them for good would be strong and constant.

Lois, too, was "not far from the kingdom;" for her heart, opened at last to her teacher, seemed to have unsounded depths of love and unselfishness, and her rebellious spirit had yielded to one of submission, though her heart still ached with loneliness and each home association was fraught with memories of Bertie that drew tears many a time from both mother and daughter.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A GLAD DISCOVERY.

MRS. MORSE was scarcely surprised when Florence failed to make her appearance on the succeeding Sabbath, and when she called to inquire whether illness had detained her from her accustomed seat, Florence told her that she had quite determined to leave Sunday-school.

For some time she had shown a persistent lack of interest that had greatly tried Mrs. Morse, who did everything in her power to make the lessons attractive; so the announcement of her determination to leave the class was scarcely a surprise, though it was a sorrow, to her teacher.

If Mrs. Morse had considered only her own comfort and the pleasure of the other members of the class, her feeling would have been one of unmixed satisfaction, for Florence had been a sore trial in many ways; but it was a grief to her to see part of her work pass from her hands unfinished, even though the failure had not been due to neglect or carelessness on her part.

Her affectionate remonstrances were of no avail to shake Florence's determination; so for a time

at least she knew she must be content to let her go away from any influence for good that she might exert over her.

It was a great comfort to remember that, after all, the most powerful agency for good was still left to her. She could pray even more earnestly than in the past that God's Spirit would strive with this girl and move her proud heart with a sense of his love.

"I see Mrs. Morse has lost one of her girls," some of the teachers remarked as they noticed the vacant chair.

But Mrs. Morse still considered the absent one among the number of "her girls," as she lovingly termed them, and her faith that her prayers for Florence's salvation would be answered in God's own time was sure and strong.

Mrs. Maynard regretted that she had asked Florence to use her influence with Nina when she saw how much unhappiness the estrangement between the two friends was causing Nina.

It did not seem possible to Mrs. Maynard that Florence could become so seriously offended that she would persistently refuse to renew her friendship with Nina, and when she realized that this was actually the case she was annoyed to think her note had been the cause of the separation.

She tried in vain to persuade Nina to treat

Florence's anger with indifference, and to become offended in her turn at the persistence with which Florence declined all overtures at reconciliation; but she was unsuccessful in her efforts.

Nina was too loyal to her friend to hear a word spoken against her, and all she would admit was that Florence did not understand her, but would do so some day.

Her first grief at the estrangement, which had so distressed her mother, wore away naturally in the course of time. Though she often longed for the day to come when the friendship should be resumed, she was content to wait patiently for it; and her loving heart expended itself in earnest prayer that Florence too might soon learn the blessedness of that peace which she had wanted Nina to give up.

Secure as Florence thought herself from all religious influence, she was being insensibly drawn by the silken cords of loving prayer nearer to the kingdom.

Lois and her mother had become such regular attendants at the weekly prayer-meeting since Bertie's death that when Mrs. Morse noticed their absence on the Wednesday evening on which Nina and Mattie had confessed their new love, she feared that sickness had detained them.

Calling the next day to inquire, she found

that her surmise had been correct. Mrs. Cramer was suffering severely with the neuralgia to which she was subject, and Lois was caring for her. The sufferer had just dropped into a quiet sleep when Mrs. Morse came, so she had an opportunity for a little conversation with Lois. The young girl was delighted at the prospect of a talk with her loved teacher, and almost immediately broached of her own accord the subject which Mrs. Morse had intended to bring up.

"Will you think it is a very strange thing to say, Mrs. Morse," she asked, "if I tell you that I do not know how to answer the first of the questions you gave me last Sunday? I do not know whether I am a Christian or not. Sometimes I think I am, and then I am afraid that I am not."

"Why do you think you are one?" Mrs. Morse asked.

"Because all my bitter, angry feelings have gone away out of my heart, and I know that I love Jesus. If I had to give darling Bertie up over again I could do it willingly now, hard as it would be to part with him; and I know it is because I love Jesus more than any one else, for only for him could I give up Bertie. Then I have the feeling that he has forgiven all my sins and that I belong to him; I can't explain it exactly, but I feel it in my heart."

"Then, dear Lois, with these feelings why are you not sure that you are a Christian?" Mrs. Morse asked.

"Just because I don't know when these feelings first came to me. I never had any time of being greatly troubled about my sins, and I know I ought to have had, for I was very wicked for a long time after father died; and when Bertie too went away I felt that I could never love God or think him anything but cruel and unjust. I have heard how miserable people were for days and weeks sometimes before they became Christians; and surely I cannot be one, when I had so much to repent of and yet have never had any time of great sorrow and perplexity. Yet I do not know what to do. I feel that Jesus has forgiven me, and so I cannot be in distress over my sins. I am troubled only because I do not know whether I am a Christian or not."

"You need not be troubled about that any longer, my dear child," Mrs. Morse answered gladly as she saw the look of peace on the face which had once been so unhappy and sullen. "You are a Christian already."

Lois' face lit up with a sudden joy at this assurance. "Oh, can that really be true when I have had no experience or time of trouble?" she asked eagerly.

"God has many different ways of dealing with his children, Lois," Mrs. Morse replied. "He does not bring them all into his kingdom in the same way. Ships do not always pass through terrible storms before they gain their harbor. Sometimes they sail quietly and peacefully into their haven without even a threatening cloud to speak of danger or possible shipwreck. Again, a vessel is almost wrecked with fierce winds and dashing waves, and barely makes harbor without being lost. But the two vessels anchor side by side in their peaceful refuge at last; and do you think any one would say that one ship was not as safely harbored as the other because it had not passed through a storm to reach that shelter? You need not fear that you are not a Christian, dear, because you have found a safe harbor without passing first through a tempest."

"Thank you," Lois whispered as she listened to her teacher's assurance. "It seemed to me as if I was hoping for too much when I believed that I might call myself a Christian without knowing the time when I came to Christ. Dear Mrs. Morse, I owe it all to you. Your love first touched my heart; and when I remembered how loving and kind you were to me when I was so unkind in return, somehow it made me think of God's love. I can't thank you; I can't even tell

you how I love you for all you have been to me; but if you could look into my heart I know you would be satisfied."

"I am more than satisfied now, dear Lois," Mrs. Morse answered as she returned the loving embrace which was a rare thing for Lois to proffer even to those she loved best.

Her heart was full of rejoicing as she went home a little later. She had labored in this corner of the Master's vineyard but a few months, barely a year, and yet he was graciously blessing her work for him and vouchsafing a bountiful harvest.

# CHAPTER XXV.

## THE COMMUNION SEASON.

THE communion season was drawing near, and Mrs. Morse was rejoiced when she found that each of the three girls was not only willing, but anxious, to publicly profess her allegiance to her new Master.

She had been somewhat disappointed at finding that neither Etta nor Nora had any serious impressions, but were as indifferent and unconcerned as if three of their classmates had not settled the great question of their lives.

It was wonderful to note the change in the feelings of the three girls towards each other when they found that they were united in the bond of love to Christ. Notwithstanding the great difference in their positions in life and in their tastes and inclinations, they became real friends, loving each other because they had fellowship with one another in the peace and pardon of God.

Lois forgot that she had looked down upon Mattie as being common and uneducated, and had despised Nina equally as being frivolous and conceited; Nina had found that there was much

to admire in both of the girls she had formerly disdained; while warm-hearted Mattie no longer remembered the causes that had provoked her former hostility, but openly loved and admired both Nina and Lois without a trace of jealousy.

Intimate associates the three girls would never be; there were too great differences in their tastes and surroundings; but friends, loving and helpful, they were and always would be.

Nina had expected to meet with opposition from her mother when she broached the subject of uniting herself with the church; but her father had paved the way for her, and Mrs. Maynard was so well aware that it would be useless to combat what Mr. Maynard encouraged that though her consent was coldly given, it was not withheld.

When Mr. Morse had called upon her to tell her of his pleasure in welcoming Nina to the number of those who had found Christ, he soon learned that she looked upon it as a matter for regret and would have prevented it if it had been possible; and he wondered sadly how a mother's heart could feel anything but joy at her child's eternal safety.

Nina was disappointed when she found that no sympathy was to be won from her mother. She loved her so dearly that it was a hard trial to realize that on one subject, dear to Nina beyond all

else, an impassable barrier existed between them, and she could not break it down.

Nina would willingly have given up her new hope had it been anything less precious, rather than have persisted in what displeased her mother. Young as she was, she realized that she must make religion attractive by her life and convince her mother that it had not robbed her of her daughter, but made the tie between them more tender and indissoluble.

Patiently and persistently the young girl set herself to work to weed out the faults which had become habitual. If her disposition had not naturally been an unusually loving and unselfish one, she would have been utterly ruined by the indulgence which had always been shown her. As it was, she was shocked when she began a rigid course of self-examination, and found how her own pleasure had been gratified at any expense to others and how little of self-denial there had been in her life.

Mrs. Maynard could not but respect Nina's new determination when she saw the change that was slowly but steadily manifesting itself in her life. The self-will that had always been one of her strongest characteristics was exchanged for a gentle submission to her parents' wishes, and the fitful flashes of temper that had

formerly manifested themselves at the refusal of anything she had set her heart upon became altogether things of the past.

Her father watched her with keen eyes and rejoiced inwardly at every victory she gained and at every evidence that she was persevering in her Christian life, and to him she went for sympathy.

He went to church with her on the Sunday which marked the public commencement of her new life; but Mrs. Maynard refused to countenance Nina by her presence. She did not allege that as a reason for declining to go, but none the less Nina understood her motive.

"Mamma, I want you to help me and be glad for me," she cried impulsively, as just before church-time she went into the room where her mother was seated in a low rocker, apparently absorbed in the last novel; and the young girl threw her arms about her mother's neck in a more loving caress than usual.

"I cannot, Nina," was the quiet answer; but the kiss which shortly followed the words comforted Nina somewhat.

Mattie's father and mother were there, beginning to realize that this new resolve of Mattie's to become a Christian was no mere fancy, but something very real and earnest. And Lois' mother sat beside her in the pew, the loving

clasp with which she held the hand that had been slipped into her own at the beginning of the service assuring her daughter of her warm sympathy.

A day of solemn rejoicing it was, not only to those who for the first time sat down at the Master's table as his children, but also to those who had been the human instruments of bringing the wandering souls back to their Father's house. There were others besides Nina, Lois, and Mattie who had passed from death to life in the last few weeks and now united themselves with God's people, but these three young lives, consecrated in their dawning with all their grand possibilities of usefulness, were a strong accession in themselves to the church.

The service was solemn and impressive, and there was a look of earnestness upon the girlish faces that showed they fully realized what they were doing when they promised, freely, unreservedly, and intelligently, to give themselves for the Master's use.

Etta and Nora were there, awed and solemnized as they saw Mattie entering into a new life of which they knew nothing. She had told them of her changed feelings and of the happiness they brought her; but her words were almost as unintelligible to them as if they had been spoken

in a foreign language, and they could not understand her.

Of one thing they were convinced, however: that this change of heart that Mrs. Morse had so often talked about was something that was possible for any one; for had not Mattie been one of themselves, interested in the same things in which they were interested? and now she had passed away from them into a world of new desires and hopes and aims.

"Somehow I feel as if we'd lost Mattie," Etta said to Nora after church. "I feel as if she had been buried or something."

"She might as well have been," Nora responded gloomily. "She wont care about anything now but going to church and prayer-meetings; and she wont be full of fun and ready for a frolic as she used to be. She wont care about us any more, so we need n't expect her to have anything to do with us."

If Mattie had taken the veil and gone into a convent to immure herself for the rest of her life, the girls could hardly have been more fully convinced that they had irrevocably lost their friend.

But they were destined to be agreeably disappointed in their gloomy anticipations. Mrs. Morse had carefully explained to Mattie the duty of being a cheerful Christian, winning others to

Christ by proving to all the world that his yoke indeed is easy and his burden light: that the best happiness is that which is not marred by sin.

Why, indeed, should a Christian be depressed or dejected, when he is bidden to cast *all* his cares upon the great Burden-bearer, the little petty every-day trials as well as great sorrows, and when "Rejoice in the Lord alway" is a command to his followers?

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MATTIE'S VICTORY.

DAY after day Mattie went steadily forward in the Christian life she had undertaken, failing often, as we all do, but trying to let each failure incite her to fresh effort.

For a little time Etta and Nora held themselves shyly aloof from her; and her companions at the store, when they heard that Mattie had, as they expressed it, "got religion," watched her curiously to see what difference it would make in her.

It was not a very noticeable change, for Mattie was as light-hearted and imperturbably good-natured as she had been in the past; she was just as ready to help a tired or sick friend by taking upon herself some of the others' work, and just as ready to enjoy any of the little jokes that passed between the girls.

All this she had formerly been, but now she had a better and higher motive running like a silver thread through each day's round of duties. She was to glorify God by her life, and so all that was selfish and unlovely must be renounced;

and the little kindly acts she had been accustomed to do merely from generous impulses became new and sweet service for the Master when she remembered "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Her independence had often led her into saying somewhat brusque and unkind things to those whose opinions differed from her own, and the habit was too strong to be readily overcome. Now and then a hasty speech would escape her; but as soon as she saw that she had wounded any one's feelings she atoned as far as she could for her hastiness by a frank apology.

As a general thing Mattie was very popular among her companions at the store; but, as is usually the case, there were some who envied her the popularity which they could not win, and they did not take any trouble to conceal their dislike and envy.

One of these, Esther Reade, had done all that she could to annoy Mattie, and between the two girls open hostility had long been pronounced. Mattie had not been slow to retaliate when she considered herself injured, and she had rather prided herself upon being able to "pay off" Esther for every unkindness. They were engaged at the same counter, unfortunately, so they had ample opportunity to carry on their quarrel,

which might have died a natural death if they had been farther apart.

On the Monday morning after Mattie had united with the church she was conscious of an unusual reluctance to go to work. She felt at peace with all the world, and at a safe distance from Esther she could be in charity with her; but she had an uncomfortable presentiment that as soon as they came in contact all her angry feelings would come to life again.

She armed herself for the day's warfare by earnest prayer that she might not bring reproach upon her Master, and went to the store fully determined to bear all things patiently for his dear sake.

The first few hours passed away without any provocation. There was an unusual rush of customers for Monday morning, owing to the announcement of bargains in ribbons, and the young saleswomen had their hands full in waiting upon the impatient crowd; but towards noon there was a lull in business and the girls had time to chat together and talk over their Sunday's occupations.

"Did you know Mattie Brown joined the church yesterday morning?" asked a young girl who stood beside Esther Reade; and Mattie's quick ear, attracted by the mention of her name, caught the low remark.

"I hate these deceitful people who are always trying to make themselves out better than any one else," was Esther's scornful answer. "I suppose she'll lord it over us more than ever now, or at any rate she will try to. A nice church member she is, when she flies up and gets so mad at the least little thing! Don't you remember how mad she got and how awful she talked to me one day about that ribbon that was marked wrong?"

"Maybe she's changed since then," suggested her companion. "You know that was a good while ago, Esther, and you were aggravating yourself that time."

"I don't care if I was," Esther answered as she smoothed some blue ribbon out and thought how becoming that particular shade was to her fair complexion. "She needn't set up to be better than the rest of us by joining the church though."

Mattie had heard every unkind word as plainly as if she had stood beside the speaker, and in an instant the old passionate temper that she had thought was under her control blazed up furiously. Her eyes flashed ominously and her cheeks grew scarlet as the hot, angry blood rushed to her head.

"Surely I haven't got to let Esther say such

hateful things and never say a word back," she thought; and she knew that in a verbal conflict she always came off victor. She must retaliate, and she had turned towards Esther to speak when she saw that the eyes of one of the girls beside her were fixed upon her, watching her curiously.

Just then a nobler and better impulse came to her. Here was a golden opportunity to show that she was in earnest. The old Mattie might have taken her own part and said sharp, bitter things to Esther, but the new Mattie, whose heart was filled with God's love, surely must not, no matter how great the provocation.

She bent her head low for a moment over a basket of ribbons, while unseen, unheard, by any but her Father in heaven, an appealing cry for help and strength went up from her heart.

Esther was evidently bent upon provoking her into a quarrel, for just then she made a still more unkind remark. But it glanced from Mattie as harmlessly as an arrow is turned aside by a shield.

The girls were all watching her; they knew how she would have resented these speeches but a short time ago; how would she treat them now?

They had not long to wait, for Mattie looked up as the last words fell upon her ears, and in a quiet voice that was free from anger, nay, more, that even was pleasant and friendly, said,

"Miss Reade, I can't help hearing what you are saying, and I want to tell you something. I did not join the church yesterday because I thought I was better than any one else, but because I had found out how wicked I was and how much I needed help to do better. I am just beginning to live a Christian life, and I am afraid I shall often do things that a Christian ought not to do; but it will not be because I am not in earnest. I 'm sorry for my part in all our quarrels, and if you will be friends with me I hope I wont do or say anything ugly again;" and she moved towards Esther with an appealing look on her face.

Much as she had heretofore disliked the girl, she would have been heartily glad just now to be reconciled to her, and she hoped Esther would not refuse to respond to her advances.

But Esther was provoked at the failure of her efforts to engage Mattie in a dispute and took no notice of her last remark, only saying as she turned her back, "Listeners never hear good of themselves, you know. If you had n't been listening to what was n't intended for your ears, you would n't have heard what I was saying."

The dangerous light flashed up again in Mattie's black eyes for a moment as her words met with such a contemptuous rejoinder. It had been hard to bring herself to make this explanation,

and she had not believed it possible that Esther would receive her apology so scornfully.

There was a little murmur of sympathy among the listeners. They could not but admire Mattie's self-control and brave words, and Esther's conduct did not appear in a very enviable light by contrast.

"Don't you mind her, Mattie; she's a hateful thing!" one of the girls exclaimed indignantly.

Perhaps the knowledge that the sympathy of the girls was on her side soothed Mattie more than she cared to acknowledge, and perhaps it was the consciousness that a victory over self and pride had been won that helped to calm her ruffled feelings. She resolved to herself that, hard though the task might be, she would by patient and persistent kindness win Esther's friendship.

Mattie little guessed what an influence for good she had exerted that morning, even though apparently her effort had been a failure as far as making friends with Esther went. None of those who had witnessed the little scene doubted Mattie's sincerity and earnestness in her new life, and they believed in the power of a religion which could so subdue a passionate temper and keep it under control.

# CHAPTER XXVII.

## INFLUENCE FOR GOOD.

MATTIE'S strong influence for good over Etta and Nora was not without its effect. She frequently persuaded them to accompany her to church on Sunday evenings instead of taking the walks in which they still delighted, and she refused to connive any more at Etta's deception of her aunt.

When Etta would promise to go to church Mattie would call for her, and if necessary beg her aunt's permission; but then she would not yield to her friend's entreaties to be allowed to join Nora in a walk.

"No; you said you wanted to go to church with me, and you must," was Mattie's inflexible determination.

"I think it 's mean in you to make me go to church just because you want to," Etta complained fretfully. "You used to help me get off without aunt's knowing it; I do n't see why you wont now."

"You know very well why I wont," Mattie answered with unruffled good-temper. "I never

used to think about its being wrong for you to deceive your aunt and tell her stories; but now that I know better, I don't mean to let you do that way any more. Now be a good girl and come to church without grumbling so much about it."

Mattie was not satisfied to rest contented with her own safety. She longed to bring her father and mother as well as her friends into the kingdom, and she worked for this end with a persistence that never wearied.

Mr. Morse had called frequently, sometimes with his wife and sometimes alone, and he had won a warm place in the hearts of the Brown family. They looked upon him as a personal friend, and talked of him first as "our Mattie's minister," and then in a very little while as "our minister."

There was rarely a service at which some of the family were not present. Sunday evenings Mattie very often remained at home and took care of the little ones, so that her father and mother might enjoy the unwonted pleasure of going to church together; and the old, old story fell upon their unaccustomed ears with new beauty and meaning. Almost unconsciously to themselves they were daily drawing nearer to the kingdom, and Mattie rejoiced in their increasing interest in the things which were so precious to her.

As Etta saw the difference in Mattie's feelings and inclinations she often puzzled over it, and had a vague desire to know for herself the secret of her friend's happiness.

"Mattie, I wish you would tell me something," she exclaimed one day. "You are always so happy, and you say it is because you are a Christian. Now you have ever so much to make you happy, anyway, for the girls all like you at the store, and you have such a nice home, where you can do as you please without any one to scold you all the time, and you have so many to love you, that you can't be anything but happy, I should think. Now what I want to ask you is this: if you were in my place, without much else to make you happy, would being a Christian make you happy?"

Mattie's face glowed with earnest feeling. "I don't think you will believe me if I tell you, Etta, for I know I wouldn't have realized it until I tried it for myself; but I know that I couldn't be so poor and miserable and friendless that I would not be happy in loving Jesus. O Etta, you are always wanting some one to love you. Just think how Jesus loves you. He died for you, just as much for you as if there was nobody else in the whole wide world; and yet you don't care enough about it even to love him back

again. Just trust in his love long enough to find how happy it will make you, and I am sure you would never give it up."

Etta shook her head mournfully. "It is very easy for you to talk," she said, "because you feel that way, but I don't. I can't make myself believe that he loves me, for I don't feel as if any one did; and I can't love him when I feel so, can I?"

"Ask him to make you love him, then," answered Mattie quickly. "If you don't believe that he loves you, and if you don't love him, why, just ask him to make you love him, and he will."

There was a ring of glad certainty in Mattie's tones, and her faith unconsciously strengthened Etta's weak belief.

"Do you suppose he really would?" she asked, longing with all her heart to feel sure of some love, for that was the one thing that she fancied would make her life happy.

"I am certain of it," Mattie responded. "You just try and see, Etta. You pray to-night, and I will pray for you too, that you may really believe that God loves you and that you may love him."

"I will," Etta answered. "You're a funny girl anyhow, Mattie," she added after a moment of thought.

"Why?" asked Mattie, smiling at her friend's puzzled expression.

"Because—I don't know exactly," Etta answered rather disconnectedly. "Somehow you seem to talk about religion and loving Jesus and all that just as you would talk about anything else that is really so."

"Well, isn't it all really so?" Mattie asked.

"Yes, I suppose so," Etta answered; "only it don't seem so, you know. Somehow you seem to mean what you say more than any one else but Mrs. Morse. I wish I felt so."

"You will, Etta, if you only try," Mattie responded, wishing that she could give her friend some of the peace which filled her heart to overflowing.

They were on their way home from the store, and just then they reached Etta's door.

"I don't believe I can come around to-night," Etta said as she lingered on the doorstep to say good-by to her friend. "Aunt has got some sewing for me to do, and I expect she'll make me stay at home to-night and do it. I hope I can get off a little while, for it seems to me she gets crosser and crosser every day."

"Come if you can," Mattie answered; "but, Etta, don't forget what you promised. You would be so much happier if you only loved Jesus,

and I can't rest satisfied until you do. Remember, you promised to ask him to-night to teach you to love him, and I will ask him too with all my heart. Good-by."

There was a difference in the faces of the two girls that corresponded to the difference in their hearts. Mattie's countenance reflected her inward peace and happiness, and there was a thoughtful look mingled with the brightness of her expression; while Etta's face wore a fretful, discontented look, as if she were wholly dissatisfied with her life, as indeed she was.

She could not satisfy all the higher desires of her nature by gay dress and occasional stolen pleasures, and the one thing for which she pined was withheld from her.

If she only had a mother, she thought longingly to herself, then surely she could never be unhappy. She was hungering for love and its expression, and the utter lack of it in her home made her unhappy and discontented.

Her aunt seemed to grow sterner and more unloving each day, and Etta sometimes felt as if death would be a welcome release from the continual stream of petty fault-finding and complaint.

But death would not be the end of everything; that was the trouble; and Etta acknowledged to herself that she was not fit to die.

"I wish I was Mattie," she said to herself as she looked after her friend for a moment, and then began to climb the long flight of stairs with weary, laggard feet.

As she had expected, her aunt bade her sit down to her sewing as soon as supper was despatched and the dishes were cleared away, and Etta had plenty of time for her sad, discontented thoughts as she sat there stitching wearily away and wishing that she could escape from her aunt's unwelcome company.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### ETTA'S DESIRE.

AUNT MARTHA wondered not a little at Etta's silence, for generally, when she had to spend the evening at home, she complained loudly and frequently at her enforced imprisonment; but to-night she sewed away in a silence that was more thoughtful than sullen.

"I wonder if she's got in any scrape at the store," thought Aunt Martha as she glanced at Etta now and then; but she knew it would be of no use to ask her, for mutual confidences were unknown between aunt and niece.

Finally, when the clock struck ten and Etta folded up her work with a weary sigh, she startled her aunt by asking abruptly, "Are you a Christian, Aunt Martha?"

"I'm enough sight better than a good many as calls themselves Christians," Aunt Martha answered briefly as she broke off a piece of thread with an energetic snap. "What did you ask me that for?"

"I don't know; I was just wondering," Etta answered. "I knew you didn't belong to any

church, but I thought maybe you loved God, and Mrs. Morse says that is what makes one a Christian."

"A heap Mrs. Morse knows, no doubt," answered her aunt, not having any special reason for finding fault with Mrs. Morse's words, but just disparaging Etta's teacher because the girl was so fond of her. "I don't see as I've got anything to love him for. I've had to work hard for my living all my life and do for others besides, and I a' n't had anything given me but what I've worked and paid for. What have I got to be thankful for, then, when I've done everything for myself?"

Etta did not answer. It did not occur to her that health and strength with which to supply one's bodily wants were blessings and gifts from God.

She went into the little bedroom which she shared with her aunt and hastily prepared for bed that she might have time to fulfil her promise to Mattie before her aunt should come in.

It was an earnest prayer, though a half-despairing one, that she uttered, wondering all the while whether Mattie was right when she said that God would answer it.

"O God, if you do love me, please make me feel as if you did, and make me love you. Amen."

She cried softly after she laid her head on her pillow. She was so lonely, so unloved, she thought; and if it made Mattie so happy to love Jesus, she did wish that she could love him too.

She had dropped into a troubled sleep when Aunt Martha came in half an hour later with her candle and saw the traces of tears on her face.

"She 's in some scrape, I 'll wager anything," she thought grimly as she blew out the light and lay down beside her niece. "Girls are an awful care; they 're always in some trouble or other. I suppose if this is anything much, I 'll hear about it; and if it is n't, why, it do n't make any difference, anyhow;" and she went to sleep without any further anxiety concerning Etta's trouble.

When Etta awoke the next morning and found her burden of loneliness just as heavy as ever, she thought to herself half triumphantly, "Now Mattie did n't know anything about it. I did pray, and I do n't feel a bit happier."

That was the first remark she made to her friend when Mattie stopped for her on the way to the store.

"What are you smiling about?" she asked as Mattie's eyes sparkled with amusement, notwithstanding her sympathy with her friend.

"You make me think of a funny old woman I heard about the other day. You prayed, but you

did n't believe that God was going to answer your prayer, and you would have been surprised if he had. This old woman prayed that a mountain at the back of her house might be moved, and as soon as she got through praying she went to the window and looked out. 'There you are yet,' she said to the mountain; 'just as I expected.' She had read that if she had faith enough, her prayer would remove mountains; but she certainly had n't any faith when she expected the mountain would stay just where it always had been. Now you must n't expect an answer right away and get discouraged if it does n't come. You must keep on praying until you get what you ask for; so do n't stop until your prayer is answered."

This was a new idea to Etta. She had thought that because her weak, doubting prayer of the night before had been apparently unheeded, there was no use in prayer; but Mattie's earnestness stimulated her to renewed effort. As the day passed away she found herself often thinking of the love which she now earnestly longed for, and gradually a sense of its preciousness dawned upon her and she realized that it would be well worth long and continued effort to obtain it.

Mattie pitied her friend's evident dejection, and once she made an errand over to her counter to whisper, "Etta dear, I'm so sorry you are

feeling so discouraged, but perhaps you are going to be happy very soon. I was never as miserable in my life as I was the day before I gave up all to Jesus, and then happiness came all at once."

But though Mattie was sorry for Etta's present unhappiness, she rejoiced in the thought that her old careless indifference had passed away. Her own experience had taught her that even the "terrible unrest" which it had seemed so cruel to pray for was a blessing when it ended in perfect peace.

"Come to prayer-meeting with me to-night," she said when business hours were over and the girls were on their homeward way. "I'll stop and ask your aunt if you can't go, and if she will let you, I will come for you as soon as supper is over."

"All right," Etta answered, not feeling any special desire for the prayer-meeting, but preferring to spend the evening anywhere with Mattie rather than with her aunt.

Aunt Martha rarely refused any request that Mattie made. It was against her usual habit to approve of any of Etta's friends, but there was something attractive about the independent, straightforward girl that she liked in spite of herself.

"I don't suppose she'll get into any mischief

with you," she said when Mattie asked if she might stop for Etta and take her to prayer-meeting. "And she a' n't such pleasant company around home that I'm likely to want more than I need of her. She can go for all I care."

The sullen look settled down again upon Etta's face as she listened to her aunt's words.

"I wish I lived somewhere where I was wanted," she exclaimed pettishly.

"And if you did, you would n't be any better satisfied than you are now, I can tell you," answered Aunt Martha. "You 'd be grumbling all the time because you had n't a free foot and could n't run when you chose."

"Then I 'll come for you, Etta," interposed Mattie, pitying her friend from the depths of her heart, and she put her hand on her shoulder with a loving pressure as she passed her.

"I do hope Etta will soon be happy," she said to herself as she walked towards her own home. "She has such an uncomfortable home that I do n't wonder she can't find any happiness there. I would n't live there with her aunt for anything if I could help it."

Etta was ready and waiting for her at the doorstep, and the two girls reached church shortly after the bell had rung for the first time.

They were almost the first comers, and they

somewhat shyly seated themselves in a corner of the well-lighted lecture-room.

They had barely taken their places when Mr. Morse came in and, seeing them, came over to shake hands with them.

"I am very glad to see you here," he said cordially. "Mattie, how goes it with you?"

Mattie had long since ceased to feel under any constraint with her pastor and she could answer him freely; then a sudden impulse made her say,

"Mr. Morse, I wish Etta felt as I do. She can't believe that Jesus loves her, and so she can't love him, though she wants to. Wont you help her?"

"Very gladly," Mr. Morse answered cordially, and his voice and manner were so kind that Etta's first impulse of indignation at Mattie for mentioning her troubles to a minister died away and she felt as if he both could and would help her.

People were beginning to come in now, so Mr. Morse glanced up at the clock. "Wont you remain a few minutes after prayer-meeting, so I can have a little conversation with you?" he asked; and Etta promised to stay.

Nina soon came in, flashing a bright smile of welcome at Mattie and Etta as she saw them in the corner, and Mattie guessed why her pretty

face was so radiant. Her father had accompanied her, and it was pleasant to see Nina's happiness as she shared her hymnal with him and sat close beside him, her little hand nestling in his part of the time.

No one but Etta and Mattie knew for whom Mr. Morse offered such fervent prayer that evening; and Etta's heart throbbed with the first faint pulsations of grateful love as she heard the prayer which so earnestly entreated that she might have a realizing sense of the Saviour's love. She was not mentioned by name, but all knew that some special need was in Mr. Morse's mind, and the petition was united in by many hearts that had learned the preciousness of the boon they were asking for another.

The girls lingered after the closing hymn had been sung and the benediction pronounced, and presently, when the congregation had dispersed, Mr. Morse called them into his study. His manner was so kind that Etta soon told him as simply as she had told Mattie how hard it was for her to believe that Jesus really loved her and how cold and lifeless her heart seemed when she tried to love him.

"And I do want to be a Christian," she concluded with a trembling voice. "I never cared about it before as I do to-night. I feel so wicked;

and it don't seem as if God could love me when I have never loved him nor tried to please him."

"We love him because he *first* loved us," Mr. Morse answered. Then very gently he tried to bring her to believe that the Saviour's love and atonement were hers if she would only accept them. The very simplicity of the step that it was necessary for her to take seemed to bewilder her, but at last an apprehension of it dawned upon her.

When Mr. Morse found that her doubts and perplexity were all cleared away and that she was willing and eager to accept Christ's righteousness, he felt that light would soon break upon her.

Before they separated he once more prayed for her in a direct, personal way that made her feel that her special need of pardon and acceptance was being carried straight to the throne of grace; and even as she knelt in the quiet study, following the petitions of the earnest prayer, peace brooded over her troubled heart.

Not all at once did a sense of pardon and peace come to her as it had to Mattie, but she felt that it was not far away and would soon be hers if she did not give up seeking for it.

"Now, as it is growing late, I will go home with you," Mr. Morse said; for he had heard from his wife something of the peculiarities of Etta's

aunt, and he did not wish Etta's present peacefulness to be jarred upon by a reproof.

But the girls protested so earnestly that they did not mind going home alone and that their friends would not have been worried about them that the tired minister gladly gave up his kindly intention.

"A' n't you glad you came, Etta?" asked Mattie eagerly as they walked swiftly towards home.

"Yes," answered Etta, "for somehow I feel as if I was very near God's love, Mattie, and it makes me glad already."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A FIRST STEP.

MATTIE was not surprised when Etta met her the next morning with an expression on her face that told the story of inward peace. She had felt that Etta's conflict was nearly over the evening before when she had parted from her.

"Have you told your aunt yet?" Mattie asked when Etta had spoken of her changed feelings.

"No," Etta answered, "and I do dread telling her; she will say something so unkind, I know. And, Mattie, there is something else I have thought of: it seems to me as if I ought to tell her how I have been deceiving her about going to church in the evenings. Of course I don't mean to do it any more, and so perhaps I don't really need to tell her, only I feel as if I ought to, somehow."

"I would if I were in your place," Mattie returned promptly. "Then you will be starting all fresh and fair on a new leaf. It is all over now, so I don't think she will be very angry, especially when you tell her yourself."

"You don't know her, then," Etta answered.

"It will make her angry to think I could keep it up so long without her finding it out. I am afraid she will say more to me than if she had found it out herself."

"Never mind if she does," said Mattie encouragingly. "I helped you, and I will go and take my share of the blame; and if she is angry, why, it will soon be over."

"Last night, somehow, it seemed to stand between me and becoming a Christian," Etta said after a little hesitation. "I thought about it and concluded I would not tell her about it, only I would never deceive her again. But still I kept feeling as if I ought to, and as long as I kept thinking I could n't I was unhappy. Finally I made up my mind that, no matter how angry she might be, I would tell her to-night; and, do you know, as soon as I settled on that then I felt that I was a Christian and nothing was keeping me back."

"Then you surely must tell her," Mattie said, "as long as you promised yourself to."

It seemed like a new world to Etta that day in the first joy of her new love. Everything seemed brighter and more beautiful, her companions were kinder and customers more considerate.

"How could I live so long without Jesus?" she asked herself, hardly able to keep her happi-

ness from breaking out in song. All the long pent-up fountains of love that had never had an object upon which to lavish themselves were loosened, and she only longed to express her love to Jesus.

All that clouded her joy was the thought of the confession she had determined to make to her aunt that night, and thinking about it all day did not tend to increase her courage.

"Shall I come in with you and take my share of blame now, or would you rather be alone when you tell her?" asked Mattie as she paused with Etta at the latter's doorstep that evening.

"I guess I would rather tell her by myself," Etta answered after a moment's thought. "Perhaps, if she is tired or cross, it will be better to tell her after supper. I truly mean to tell her, but I want to choose the easiest time."

"I hope she wont be hard on you," Mattie said sympathetically. "But if she does scold, dear, just remember that we really all did deserve a scolding, for it was wrong to deceive her so, and it's right to tell her about it now. It will help you to think Whom you are doing it for."

Mattie could hardly understand Etta's fear of her aunt, and she had often wondered why her friend took so much trouble to conceal from her little things that were really of no importance.

The constant fault-finding, instead of hardening Etta into indifference, had made her over-sensitive to blame, and she was prone to exaggerate every unkind remark and brood over it, instead of dismissing it from her mind. To escape the criticism that was likely to be bestowed upon all her actions, she had acquired the habit of concealment, and had not the least compunction about deceiving her aunt in any way.

It was more of a trial to her than can easily be imagined to confess her wrong-doing with the expectation of a severe reproof.

She found her aunt in far from a pleasant or amiable mood, and her heart sank at the thought of arousing her anger. She had determined, however, not to put off her confession until another day lest her courage should utterly fail.

"You 've got to make yourself useful for once," was her aunt's salutation as Etta came in. "I have n't been able to do anything about supper, I 've got such a pain in my shoulder. It 's rheumatism, I suppose, and I do n't know what I 'll do if I 'm in for a long spell of it. Hurry up now and do n't be long about it, for the fire wont hold out for more than half an hour."

Usually Etta would have obeyed in sullen silence, but a new spirit was influencing her today, and she followed its prompting.

"I'm sorry you've got such a pain," she said pleasantly as she took off her hat and sacque and hung them up. "Can't I rub your shoulder for you?"

"You'd better do what I told you first," was the curt response; and Etta in silence put on the great gingham apron that hung behind the door, discouraged by her failure to please her aunt.

"It's no use trying to be pleasant to her," she thought sadly as she busied herself in the preparation of the simple meal, obeying without a word the sharp directions her aunt issued every now and then. "She has been good to me in one way, for she has given me a home; but if she would only love me a little and let me love her, I would be so glad. I don't believe I'll try to speak nicely to her any more."

Every moment it seemed more impossible for her to make her dreaded confession. While she was eating her supper she glanced nervously several times at the stern, hard-featured face opposite, and wondered whether the words would come if she tried to speak them.

"I must tell her; I must," she whispered to herself when supper was over at last and the dishes had all been neatly washed and put away.

Aunt Martha sat in her chair by the window groaning every now and then with the pain in

her shoulder; and when Etta, with a prayer for help, nerved herself to the effort of confession and said timidly, "Aunt Martha!" the sharp "Well?" would have been discouraging to a braver heart.

"I want to tell you something," the girl went on, speaking rapidly, though her voice trembled with agitation. "I am going to try to be a Christian after this. I learned to love Jesus last night, and I have asked him to forgive me for all I have done that has been wicked. There is something I have been doing lately that I think I ought to tell you and ask your forgiveness for. Until Mattie joined the church and made me go with her Sunday evenings, I used to go for walks instead of to church, as I told you I wanted to. I did n't think then how wrong it was to deceive you. I just wanted the fun, and I knew you would n't let me go for a walk, so I made believe I wanted to go to church. I am very sorry, Aunt Martha, and I wont do it any more." Her voice quivered so that the last words were almost inaudible as she finished the speech that seemed so long.

The cloud of anger on Aunt Martha's face grew blacker every moment as she listened to her niece's confession, and no thought of forgiveness entered her mind.

"No, I do n't think you will do it again, you wicked, ungrateful girl!" she exclaimed angrily

as she frowned with displeasure. "I shall watch you after this and see that you don't get any more chances to deceive me that way. You are not fit to be trusted out of my sight for a moment, and I'll not be fool enough to believe a word you say after this. How dare you tell me to my face that you got the best of me in that shameless way by telling me you wanted to go to church? Church indeed! I doubt whether you ever go there, or ever have been, for that matter. Not a word will I hear from you," she exclaimed sharply as Etta tried to interpose a word. "If it wasn't for the sake of the family I'd wash my hands of you altogether and turn you out in the street to find a home the best you might. You don't deserve all the trouble and expense you've been to me all your life, and I don't want any more of your pious hypocrisy around here. I suppose you want to fool me again to carry out your own purposes."

Poor Etta! It had been even worse than she had expected, for the sharp twinges of pain in her aunt's shoulder had considerably increased her irritability.

"She need not have been so hard on me when I told her about it myself," she thought as she threw herself on her bed and buried her face in the pillow to hide the tears that would come. "And it is so cruel in her a call me a hypocrite

because I told her I was going to be a Christian;" and the remembrance of this unjust accusation made the tears flow still faster.

Her heart was fast filling itself with the bitter, angry thoughts she had tried to banish as she lay there and thought over her wrongs, and as she realized this she made a brave effort to drive them away and call kinder ones into their place.

"Aunt Martha isn't so very much to blame for thinking that I am not in earnest now," she argued to herself. "I told her I wanted to go to church when I didn't, so of course she hasn't much reason for believing that I am speaking the truth now when I tell her that I want to be a Christian. I must prove it to her by acting like a Christian. If I try very hard, perhaps she will believe that I mean to be different and care for me a little. I am sorry her shoulder hurts her so, and perhaps she wouldn't have been so cross if she had felt well. I'll go and offer to do something for her."

It cost no little struggle with self to subdue her angry feelings and resolve to offer to help her aunt, but in her new strength Etta won the victory; and drying her eyes she soon regained her composure.

Every now and then a groan of pain escaped from her aunt, who was really suffering severely;

and Etta, remembering that she had heard one of the neighbors often speak of the merits of a liniment she had, went and borrowed the bottle, the contents of which she was assured would speedily end her aunt's pain.

"Let me rub your shoulder with this liniment," she said when she reëntered the room. "Mrs. Ellis says it will cure you by to-morrow if you let me rub it well for you."

"I don't care if you do," was the somewhat ungracious acceptance of her offer. "I'm nearly out of patience with it already, and I wont be able to take a stitch to-morrow if it keeps on this way."

Long and patiently Etta rubbed until her arm ached with the unaccustomed labor, and at last the liniment and its application brought relief to Aunt Martha.

"There, that'll do," she said at last, just as Etta had come to the conclusion that she could not keep up the rubbing a minute longer, she was so tired.

"Does it feel better," Etta asked, hoping for a word of appreciation.

"Yes; some. I guess I'll go to bed now and maybe I'll get to sleep before it begins to ache again."

In no way, either by word or manner, did she

show any gratitude for Etta's patient effort to relieve her pain, though it was not unappreciated. She wondered not a little at Etta's willingness to do anything for her after she had reproved her so sharply, but she was so unaccustomed to speaking pleasantly that it would really have cost her a great effort to express the feelings that were in her heart just then.

"I was too hard on her this evening when she need n't have told me about her slipping off that way if she had n't had a mind too," she reflected as she settled herself for sleep. "But my shoulder hurt me so that I said more than I meant to. A good scolding wont hurt any one, though, and if she did n't deserve it all then she will some other time."

Was her evening's labor in vain? Etta wondered as she lay down beside her aunt a little later. She had tried so hard to overcome her angry feelings and do a kind action, and yet she had no reason to think that she had softened her aunt's heart in the least by her sacrifice.

For a little while a tired, discouraged feeling asserted itself; then she remembered gladly that it had not been for her aunt's sake, but for Jesus, that she had won this victory over self, and it was well worth doing for his dear sake.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### COMING TRIALS.

It is well that we cannot look forward and see what lies before us. If Etta could have known that night what lay before her in the weeks to come, I think she would have been dismayed and utterly discouraged.

Her aunt moaned at intervals during the night and tossed restlessly around in her sleep, and awoke in the morning unrefreshed and irritable with pain.

"I don't believe I can get up," she said when she tried in vain to rise, but fell back with a groan. "I ache all over and my shoulder is worse than a toothache. You 'll have to get breakfast and maybe I can get up then."

But when breakfast was prepared and eaten she felt no better, and reluctantly made up her mind that she would have to stay in bed that day.

Etta dressed herself and was preparing her lunch to take to the store with her when she suddenly realized how lonely it would be for her aunt to lie there all day alone, dependent on the care of an obliging neighbor.

True, she would not suffer for anything, for Mrs. Carson was a kind-hearted woman and would see that her sick neighbor had everything she needed; but she had a large family of little children and her visits would of necessity be very brief and far apart.

Should she stay at home with her? Etta pondered the question as she buttered the slices of bread she had cut. She would lose her day's wages, but Etta did not mind that as much as she did the thought of being shut up all day with her aunt.

If she decided to stay, she must watch for Mattie and send word to the store by her. It was very hard to make up her mind to stay at home. She had often been sick and her aunt had gone to work just the same, so she did not feel under any obligations of gratitude in the matter.

But it would be so hard to lie there and suffer all alone without any care or sympathy, and pity for her aunt finally decided the matter. When Mattie stopped to call for Etta, as usual, she was charged with a message to the manager explaining her friend's absence.

"It will be hard work to-day, Mattie," she said. "I don't think I could do it for aunt alone, even though I am sorry for her. But I can do it for Jesus."

Etta needed to remember many a time that day for whom she had given up her own inclinations, for it seemed impossible to please her aunt.

"I'm going to stay at home with you to-day," she said when she went up stairs again after bidding Mattie good-by. "Then you wont have to depend on Mrs. Carson for everything; and perhaps if I give your shoulder another good rubbing it wont hurt so."

She had expected to see a look of pleased surprise when she announced her intention of staying at home, but Aunt Martha only answered,

"You rubbed me too hard last night, I believe, and that's what makes me so sore now. Rub it gently this time."

Etta got the bottle, and, helping her aunt sit up in bed, bared the swollen shoulder and began to rub it with gentle touch.

The flesh was too inflamed to bear the least further irritation, and Aunt Martha at once cried out with pain.

"Stop, stop!" she exclaimed. "I can't stand that; it only makes it worse!" And with many a groan she laid herself down in bed again.

"Had n't I better get the doctor?" Etta asked, as the pain still seemed to increase and she knew of no remedies to suggest.

"Do you think I'm made of money?" Aunt

Martha asked pettishly. "Who's to pay him? I'd like to know. I'm not going to spend any of my money on one. I haven't had a doctor for fifteen years, and I don't mean to begin fooling with one now."

She changed her mind, however, when she grew feverish with her pain and found that it was steadily increasing all the time.

"I expect you'll have to fetch a doctor," she said reluctantly at last. "Maybe he can give me something that will make me all right in one visit."

Etta had begun to be seriously uneasy about her aunt and was very glad to avail herself of the permission to call the doctor.

About three o'clock in the afternoon he came and pronounced Aunt Martha's sickness to be inflammatory rheumatism.

He was a man used to dealing with all kinds of people or he might have been alarmed at the storm of indignation his words brought upon him from his patient.

"Don't tell me I've got inflammatory rheumatism," said Aunt Martha angrily. "I've got no time to lie abed for weeks with it, and I've known people that had to. I wont have it. I sent for you to give me something to fix me up at once, so I wouldn't have a long spell of sickness,

and now you tell me I've got inflammatory rheumatism. Why don't you tell me what to take, so I can get rid of it at once?"

"It will have to take its own time," the doctor remarked, rapidly pencilling a prescription. "But I hope I can relieve your suffering somewhat. Will you get this prescription filled at once?" he added, handing a folded paper to Etta; "and give it to her according to these directions. I will come in to-morrow to see her."

"Will you have to come again?" Aunt Martha asked in a tone of such despair that it brought a smile to the doctor's face.

"Yes, you will have to resign yourself to several more visits," he answered as he took his hat and prepared to leave.

Aunt Martha burst into tears as the doctor closed the door behind him. She was not used to giving way to her feelings, but the pain she had undergone had made her weak and nervous, and she cried until she had completely exhausted her tears over the prospect of a long, painful illness.

Etta's heart was filled with pity for her, and she knelt down beside the bed and put her arm about her, the first caress she had ever offered.

"Don't cry, aunt; please don't!" she entreated. "I will take care of you, and perhaps you will not be sick as long as you think."

Aunt Martha did not like sympathy. It always angered her to have anybody know that she needed pity for any ailment, either of body or mind, and she pushed Etta away fretfully.

"Much care you will take of me!" she said. "I know just how much to expect from you. It's easy to say, 'Don't mind about it,' when you are well and strong yourself. Go away and leave me alone. I'm tired of having you fussing about."

Hurt and vexed at this repulse, Etta put on her hat and went to the drug-store to get the prescription filled. Her heart was very heavy as she walked slowly along; her burden seemed greater than she could bear even then, and she knew that it would not grow lighter for some time to come.

How could she nurse her aunt when she was so irritable and hard to please? Yet there was no one else to take care of her, unless she should go to a hospital and be nursed by strangers; and Etta shrank from the thought. It was really a small sacrifice to make when she remembered how many years of care, unloving, it is true, but still necessary care, her aunt had bestowed on her. It would be cruel ingratitude to refuse to care for her now in her illness, even though it would be a trying task to minister to her.

It was a duty plainly placed before her, and she must do it faithfully and well—for Jesus' sake.

Ah, what a difference those three words made! They lightened the burden and brought back peace to Etta's troubled heart.

"I will be very patient," she thought to herself; "and she will not be so cross when she finds out that I am really sorry and mean to do all I can to make her more comfortable."

She hastened back with the prescription and administered it according to the doctor's directions; and then she painted the inflamed shoulder with a preparation he had given her for this purpose.

"You 'll have to finish those overalls on the machine," Aunt Martha said as she lay down again, feeling somewhat relieved. "I promised to finish them by to-night, but if you can get them done to take them back to-morrow, it will have to do. You can do them well enough, for it 's mostly plain, straight seams."

Etta stitched busily away till it commenced to grow dark; then she laid her work aside and began to get supper. It had been the longest day she had ever known in all her life, she thought to herself as she stirred the fire and put the kettle on to boil. Would every day seem so endless? she wondered wearily.

After the meal had been eaten and cleared away she sat down to her sewing again, cheered a

little by Mattie's brief visit and her words of sympathy. It was tedious work, for she was not expert at it, as her aunt was; and as she saw how little she had accomplished by bedtime, she wondered whether she would be able to finish her task by the next day.

"How are you getting along with those overalls?" Aunt Martha asked as the clock struck ten and Etta put aside her work with a little sigh of weariness.

"I can do them all right," Etta answered, "only it takes me ever so much longer than it does you."

"You'd soon get into the way of doing them fast," her aunt answered. "If I've got to lie abed for two or three weeks and you stay home from the store, you'd better ask for some more overalls to-morrow and bring them home with you to do. We can't live on nothing nor go into debt; and little as you will make for a while, it will be better than nothing."

"All right," Etta responded, trying to keep the disappointment out of her tones. It was such disagreeable work and it had been such a task to finish these few that to look forward to sewing them day after day until her aunt should be well again was a discouraging prospect.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A HARD LESSON.

THE overalls were the lightest part of Etta's troubles in the days and nights that followed, dragging their weary lengths away in slow succession. Many a hot tear fell on the rough cloth and many a prayerful thought was stitched into the long seams, for Etta's life was full of trials. Not very great ones, perhaps; but do we not all know how hard to bear are those tiny pin-pricks of discomforts and anxieties that seem in the telling hardly worth minding?

Aunt Martha was unused to sickness and pain, and she had no idea of bearing her really severe pain patiently. She was selfish in her suffering, and no thought of sparing the steps of her patient little nurse ever entered her mind.

Her wants were innumerable. She would fretfully ask for a drink of water, and hardly could Etta give her that and return to the interminable overalls before she would want to have the arrangement of her pillows altered. In less than five minutes, perhaps, the light in the room would annoy her. Either it was too bright and dazzled

her eyes, or the room was as gloomy as a grave; and the curtain must be pulled up or down, as the case might be, until she was satisfied. Then she would want something to eat, and nothing seemed to satisfy her capricious appetite. Etta utterly despaired of seasoning anything to suit the invalid, though her best efforts were not withheld from the task.

From morning till night Etta was kept busy, and every half-hour all night she had to get up for something that her aunt wanted.

She made a resting-place on the floor for herself, for the least jar or movement brought a cry of pain from her aunt and she could not have any one occupy the bed with her.

Etta would be so completely worn out by bedtime that her sleep was too profound to be easily disturbed. After one night, when her aunt had had considerable difficulty in arousing her, Etta tied a string to her wrist and fastened the other end to a chair by her aunt's bed, so that she could be more easily awakened.

As the inflammation spread and Aunt Martha's pain increased she required more attention, and some nights it seemed to Etta as if she had barely put her head on her pillow after one want had been supplied before she was called for something else.

In all this time Aunt Martha never once remembered that a word of loving appreciation or gratitude would have lightened the burden which rested so heavily on the girlish shoulders. She never spared complaint or fault-finding if she fancied that there was any occasion for it, but a word of affection or praise never by any chance escaped her; so it was not strange that Etta often grew utterly discouraged in her work.

She did not grudge the care she gave the sufferer, and she would not have been content to resign into the hands of strangers the work which she felt to be hers; still it was very hard to bear the invalid's unreasonable fault-finding, and when she was doing her very best to be accused of selfishness and loving her own ease.

"For Jesus' sake." That was the talisman that kept her from utter discouragement in these days.

For Etta was neither a saint nor an angel. She was very human, and very often her patience would give way before unprovoked impatience and a hasty retort would reply to the sufferer's querulousness. Her face would flush with anger and her eyes flash with indignation at some little injustice which seemed unbearable. When nerves are strained to their utmost and physical strength is exhausted by demands upon it night and day,

it is not to be wondered at if long-suffering sometimes fails utterly and temper asserts itself. It is quite as much a result of a disordered physical condition as of a faulty spiritual state; but Etta did not know this and mourned bitterly over her failures, fearing that her new love was growing cold and lifeless.

Days rolled away into weeks, and the weeks became a month before Aunt Martha began to amend; and her convalescence was scarcely less trying than her illness had been. Kind-hearted neighbors came in frequently and offered to share in nursing her, but their patience was speedily exhausted by her petulance, so the burden rested principally upon Etta.

Mrs. Morse called very frequently, and her loving words of encouragement always inspired Etta to renewed effort. The teacher saw just how trying a discipline it was through which the young girl was passing, and she longed to help her bear her troubles when she saw how they were weighing upon her. Aunt Martha yielded by degrees to the charm of her pleasant ways, and was less petulant and irritable while she was there. Mrs. Morse often spent an hour at a time with her, insisting upon Etta's taking that time for out-door exercise and rest from her otherwise continual care.

Mr. Morse too often called, and Aunt Martha stood in too great awe of him to be her usual querulous self when he was there.

Mattie always stopped every morning on her way to the store to see if there was anything she could do for her friend; and in the evening she came for a longer visit and stitched away at the overalls, unless the invalid's nervousness was so great that talking disturbed her, in which case she would peremptorily bid Mattie go home.

The other members of Etta's class did not forget her. Nora often came with Mattie, and her sympathy cheered her friend. And Nina sent great bouquets of flowers—which, as she knew, made Etta happier than they did the sick woman—and baskets of fruit which were very acceptable. The cool white grapes and juicy oranges refreshed the parched, feverish mouth, and since they came from Etta's friend, made Aunt Martha less impatient with Etta for a time.

Lois too did all that she could to show her sympathy and friendship; and if the invalid would have allowed it, she would have shared Etta's labor of nursing.

But Aunt Martha would not hear of accepting her offer. "I'm not going to have a fine lady like that sitting around and asking what I want," she said decisively. "If you wont wait on me

I'll go to a hospital, but I wont have strangers around;" so Etta said no more.

All that was womanly and unselfish in Etta's nature developed rapidly under this discipline, and even her aunt was constrained to admit to herself that there was a wonderful change in the girl.

She was as patient and tender a nurse as if she had been caring for a dearly-loved mother, and Aunt Martha knew that she had never done anything to win her niece's affection.

"She could n't do more for me if I'd petted and indulged her all her life," she thought. "I wonder what she does it for."

Some one else too wondered what she did it for. Nora, spending an hour with her friend, felt her own temper rising when she listened to the fretful impatience of the invalid and her utter unreason.

"How can you stand it, Etta?" she asked indignantly when she stood at the door for a few last words with her friend; and noting how thin and pale Etta had grown and how hollow her eyes were, she went on, "Do n't kill yourself for her, Etta. You look like a ghost now. What on earth do you do it for, anyway? You surely do n't love her, and she has never been good to you."

Etta hesitated a moment. She felt a girlish

reluctance to speak of the things nearest to her heart to this friend who did not know how sacred and precious a thing her love for Jesus was. Yet why should she not speak? And so after a pause the answer came: "For Jesus' sake."

"Do you really mean just that?" Nora asked; and she wondered at the joyous light that came into the tired face as Etta answered,

"Yes."

Nora went home with a new resolve taking form in her heart. She would know for herself something of this new love which had so changed her friends and which they prized so highly. And Etta, as she went back to her weary watch by the sick-bed, little guessed that her simple words had aroused in her friend's heart a desire to become a Christian too.

"It is *so* hard," she said once to Mrs. Morse when the day's trials had seemed almost unbearable and every unkind word had brought swift tears.

And the loving teacher, holding the tired girl to her as tenderly as a mother might have done, answered, "God knows best, dear, and he has sent you this discipline. He knows that, hard as it is, it is just what you need most. Take it as a lesson you are to learn in God's school, and it will bring you a blessing and teach you wonder-

ful lessons of love and trust that you could never learn in any other way."

It comforted Etta to remember those words, and she remembered with them the loving embrace, which warmed her heart, though it was only a token of an earthly friend's love.

She had gained an unfailing Helper just in time for this season of special need. Without the strength which came to her day by day and hour by hour in answer to her earnest prayers, she could never have borne this trial; and she was very glad that she had found her Saviour in time to claim his promise of help and strength for these days.

Every one but her aunt noticed the girl's growing weakness and pallor. It was visibly an effort for her to keep about at the necessary employment that each day brought, and finally the doctor remonstrated.

"You will have your niece down sick pretty soon if you don't try to help yourself a little more. She is badly run down and needs a tonic now."

"I'm sure I don't know where the money is to come from," complained Aunt Martha fretfully. "I sha' n't have a cent to call my own for a year to come by the time I get your bill paid and pay for the medicines I've had already too.

Etta's all right enough; she never was a strong-looking girl, anyhow. She always looked peaked and delicate."

"If she isn't strong it's all the more reason that she shouldn't overwork herself," the doctor answered gravely, casting a pitying glance at the tired figure sitting by the window in the next room, stitching away at the overalls, with a weary droop in the shoulders that touched his heart, inured to suffering though it was by the trouble he saw daily in his visits among his patients.

But no one could convince Aunt Martha that any one was ailing or needed any care or nursing besides herself, and Etta never complained. If she had, perhaps Aunt Martha might have been warned in time. As health and strength came back to her she found herself strangely disinclined to exertion or any effort to take care of herself. It never occurred to her that this disinclination might merit the harsh name of laziness, for hitherto she had always deserved her reputation for being a hard-working, industrious woman.

Not infrequently, however, it occurs that after a long illness even the most active of people become so used to being nursed and waited upon that they are reluctant to begin to take care of themselves and do not recognize the boundary line between helplessness and indolence.

Some days after Aunt Martha was quite able, if she had only recognized the fact, to come to the table for her meals and assist in some of the lighter household duties, she still required Etta to wait on her and bring everything that she needed to the chair in which she sat, propped among pillows.

Etta was more languid than usual one morning. She felt as if at last her strength was utterly exhausted and she must give up. Her limbs ached wearily, as they had for some days, and her head throbbed with pain whenever she moved. She dragged herself slowly about the room, putting the breakfast dishes away, feeling as if each step would be the last her strength would hold out for.

"Put some more coal on that fire, Etta," Aunt Martha said, drawing her shawl about her shoulders. "It must be getting low."

Etta stooped and raised the coal-scuttle, but she staggered under its weight.

"Look out what you 're doing!" Aunt Martha cried sharply.

But Etta did not hear her words; a strange dizziness seized her and she fell on the floor unconscious.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### JOY AFTER SORROW

AUNT MARTHA screamed when she saw Etta's white face and motionless figure, and a neighbor who had heard her fall came running in.

"Poor child!" she exclaimed as she ran to her.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Aunt Martha. "You don't know what a turn she gave me."

"What's the matter? Matter enough, I should say!" retorted the neighbor, who had been longing for a chance to "give the old woman a piece of her mind," as she expressed it. "You're what's the matter with her. Anybody else that had eyes in their head could see that you were just killing the child by inches, the way you've made her slave for you since you've been sick. Night nor day not a moment's rest she's had for five weeks, and the only wonder is that she's stood it this long. I knew she'd got to break down some time soon. And never a kind word has she had with it all! Any one else would have left you to get along the best way you could if you had said half to them that you have to this poor girl. She couldn't please you nohow, no

matter what she did; and she had the patience of an angel with you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, that's what you ought, treating a motherless girl the way you've treated her. You've never been kind to her; and enough to eat and a place to sleep is the least a girl like her wants. It's a wonder you haven't driven her away to make a home for herself with your surly ways. Now if you don't treat her right, I'll offer her a home with my own girls, for she's able to pay her way as far as her expenses is concerned, and as for the love, I'll throw that in. Get out of that chair and come and help me. You a'n't sick any more; you're only lazy."

Never before in all her life had Aunt Martha listened to such plain talk, and it had the wholesome effect of a vigorous tonic. It had never occurred to her before that in withholding love and kindness from the motherless girl she had done her as grievous an injustice as if she had not given her enough to eat. Now that her eyes were opened to it, she saw too how selfish and ungrateful she had been during her illness in exacting so much attention from Etta and never repaying her even by a word of thanks.

"Lazy!" The word stirred her very blood and made her get out of her chair with more animation than she expected ever to feel again.

Was Etta going to die? Had she really worked herself to death? Her aunt was so anxious that she forgot to be angry, and she knelt down by the prostrate girl with real sorrow in her face.

"There, honey, now that makes you feel better, don't it?" said Mrs. Carson, bathing Etta's face with cold water and rubbing her hands. "Now try if I can help you to the bed, so you can lie down and rest a bit," she went on as Etta opened her eyes at last.

She half carried, half dragged the girl into the bedroom and laid her on the bed, spreading a shawl over her.

"Now I'm going for the doctor," she announced defiantly, turning to Aunt Martha, who had followed her into the bedroom and stood looking helplessly at her. "I a' n't a-going to ask your permission neither, for you were so powerful stingy about having him come to see you so often I suppose you'd think it was a waste of money entirely to have him for Etta." And she marched off without waiting for any response, longing to emphasize her indignation by slamming the door, but prudently refraining for Etta's sake.

It was so comfortable to lie still for a little while when she was so tired out and exhausted; and Etta lay with closed eyes till the doctor came.

"I'm afraid it's going to be a case of typhoid

fever," he said briefly after he had asked a few questions and felt the fluttering pulse.

"Where would she get typhoid fever?" asked Aunt Martha half defiantly, half anxiously.

"Well, all she's been through with the last few weeks was enough to give her almost anything," said the doctor, to Mrs. Carson's intense delight.

"She was not strong enough to stand the continuous strain day and night upon her; and then sleeping on the floor, having her rest broken every hour, not having enough out-door exercise or nourishing food, were all calculated to pull her down. She had her hands so full in caring for you that she did not take any care of herself; and you remember I warned you some time ago that she was overdoing. She will need the best of care and nursing now."

He left prescriptions for her, promising to look in during the afternoon and see how she was coming on, and then went his way.

Mrs. Carson bustled about and fixed Etta comfortably in bed. When she had dropped into a quiet slumber the good neighbor went back to her own work, of which she had plenty, though she was always ready to leave it to go to any other person's assistance.

For an hour Etta slept, and through that hour

her aunt sat beside her, a complete revolution taking place in her heart. She was not a cruel or bad woman, only unloving, and perhaps given to selfishness; but as she looked back over the past and remembered how persistently she had denied caresses and love to Etta even as a baby, her heart smote her. The girl's life had indeed been a lonely, loveless one, and how had she repaid these years of loneliness and neglect? By care and nursing that might perhaps cost her her own life; for the doctor, wishing to insure care for her, had emphasized the fact that she was very ill.

A great wave of remorseful tenderness surged over Aunt Martha's heart as she remembered the unselfish devotion with which Etta had nursed her through all these long weeks without a word or look of thanks.

How could she have been so blind, so selfish? Etta had won her love in spite of herself; but now it was too late to hope for Etta's love. She must have wholly alienated the girl by her fretfulness and bitter speeches. And now that she thought it would not be possible to win her niece's love, strange as it may seem, she coveted it.

"I 'm a lonely old woman, but we might have been happy if I had only let her love me," she said to herself as she knelt beside the bed and looked at the quiet face.

Etta's eyes opened and she saw her aunt beside her. She looked at her in surprise, not thinking what emotion had drawn her there.

"Etta, child!" Surely the voice was tremulous with feeling, and the old, hard ring was gone. "I've been a blind, selfish old woman and I don't deserve to have you love me, but—"

She never finished the sentence, for Etta put out her arms with a radiant smile of content lighting up her face and drew her aunt to her. "I shall be so happy now if you will love me," she whispered softly, forgetting all her loneliness and heartache in the joy of having won her aunt's love.

For a day or two she lay smilingly content on her pillow, forgetting all of unkindness that she had ever received, while her heart overflowed with love that seemed all the stronger because it had been repressed so long. Then the fever in her veins burned more fiercely, and she lay unconscious for long days, tended lovingly by friends who scarcely hoped that her strength would last through the long strain upon it.

Stern and undemonstrative as Aunt Martha was by nature, she learned loving, caressing ways in these days, and no mother could have watched more untiringly beside a child than she did at Etta's bedside.

"Pray that she may live till I can show her how dear she is to me," she would entreat Mr. Morse; and unused as her lips were to prayer, she would follow his petitions with heartfelt earnestness.

Mrs. Morse watched beside Etta long hours at a time, tears filling her eyes as the girl in her unconscious ravings called for her and told her how she loved her.

Mattie and Nora prayed with intense earnestness for the friend that they thought was lost to them; and Nora longed to have her return to consciousness, if only for a moment, that she might tell her that her self-denial "for Jesus' sake" had not been in vain, for she had led a friend to the Saviour by it.

What would they have done in these long, dark days without the strength that no earthly comforter could have given them?

But at last the tide turned. The fever slowly burned itself away, and Etta, very weak and helpless, but out of danger, had passed the crisis in safety.

There was no lack of loving care and attention now, and the manifestations of regard that the young girl received from all who knew her made her very happy.

Aunt Martha would have felt it to be no more

than right if she had been far from the first in Etta's esteem, but she was strangely touched when the girl clung to her with the fondest affection.

Etta's dream of happiness was realized now that she had a home where she was loved and wanted, and her hungry heart was satisfied at last. Aunt Martha strove now by the tenderest devotion to atone for the long years of neglect, and she succeeded, for Etta, happy in the present, never cast a backward thought at the dark and loveless past.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### ALL SAFE AT LAST.

ALL but one now of Mrs. Morse's girls was safe in the fold, and her heart rejoiced over them with exceeding joy as they gathered about her Sunday after Sunday, united in the bonds of love to their Saviour and a warm friendship for each other.

Each one was striving to live a consistent Christian life and trying to glorify their Saviour by following his example of unselfishness and love. Many a failure marked their onward progress, for they were not ideals of goodness, but real, every-day girls; still they had learned where to go for strength and help, and they never gave up entirely. Not a Sunday passed that Mrs. Morse did not impress upon them that now that they had come to Jesus themselves, the very knowledge of his precious love constituted them ambassadors to those who were yet afar off; and they were eager to carry the glorious message to father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends.

Only one was still out of Christ, and over that one Mrs. Morse's heart yearned tenderly. The

girls united in earnest prayer for her, and though she persisted in absenting herself alike from church and Sunday-school, Florence could not escape from those loving prayers.

She had never forgiven Nina for not giving up her hope in Jesus when she had bidden her choose between that and her friendship; and though Nina had made several advances towards reconciliation, Florence had repulsed them all.

A loving note of entreaty, in which Nina had poured out her heartfelt longing that Florence would number herself among those who had given themselves to Jesus, was returned to her; and after that Nina waited patiently for the time, which she believed would surely come, when the prayers for Florence would be answered.

But Florence's heart seemed to grow colder and more hardened each day, and if a human friend could have read her feelings, he might have judged that she had already sinned away her day of grace.

She fancied that she was perfectly happy and secure in her indifference, and cultivated advanced notions of skepticism and unbelief as being intellectual. Often she pictured herself as meeting death, and fancied she could face it without a tremor.

She was awakened roughly from this delusion

one day. She had been feeling rather languid and weak all the morning, and going into a small, dimly-lighted closet where medicines were kept, she took up a bottle that contained, as she supposed, a tonic which she was accustomed to use. Not caring to be at the trouble to procure a glass and spoon, she put the bottle to her lips and drank about a tablespoonful of its contents. A low cry of horror escaped her as she swallowed the liquid and recognized the taste of laudanum.

There was a scene of indescribable distress and terror in the Estabrook mansion for a short time. Servants were despatched in different directions for doctors, while Judge Estabrook paced up and down the floor nearly beside himself with anxiety, and his wife went into hysterics.

And Florence? She sat rigid and motionless, waiting for the death that she thought was face to face with her. She was stunned by the thought that life, beautiful as it had been to her, was ended, and that now the other life would soon begin.

All her fancied readiness had vanished, all her pride and self-righteousness had fallen from her like a mantle, and with agony that cannot be put into words she realized her utter unfitness for death.

It was too late now, she thought, to make the preparation which she would not make before,

and not a prayer escaped her rigid lips or rose from her paralyzed spirit.

Oh, for time! If she had but one day more to spend on earth how earnestly she would employ it in preparing for death; but now, "Too late! too late!" throbbed like a death-knell in her brain.

The doctor rushed in breathless upon the scene, while the father walked the room in anguish and the mother screamed and moaned.

"How much did you take? Let me see the bottle," he said hurriedly; and Florence, strangely composed by the very intensity of her feelings, took the bottle from the closet shelf and placed it in his hand.

The doctor held it up to the light, while a curious expression found a place on his face. He uncorked the bottle, smelled the contents, and finally put it to his lips and tasted it.

"My dear young lady, compose yourself," he said blandly, forgetting that she was the only quiet one in the room. "This is indeed laudanum, but such a very diluted solution of it that I wonder that you recognized the taste. I would not venture to say that you might safely take the whole bottle, but the small portion you have swallowed will not have any bad effect upon you."

A criminal reprieved when he stands upon the scaffold with the black cap upon his head and the fatal noose about his neck would alone appreciate Florence's feelings as death vanished away like a grim phantom, and she knew that her life was yet before her—days, years, it might be, of that glad being which she called life.

The doctor's services were needed by Mrs. Estabrook, for on hearing that Florence was safe her hysterics became even more alarming than they had been before, and the family had their hands full in restoring her to rational consciousness.

By bedtime that evening the household had regained their usual serenity, and only an added warmth in the good-night salutations reminded them of the alarm of the morning.

But Florence's usual indifference had not returned to her, and she felt that she could never win it back again, try as she might. Death *had* terrors for her, and now in the quiet night she remembered the great horror that had seized her when she thought that her life was ended.

A deep conviction of sin settled down upon her, and the proud heart was humbled as she had never dreamed that it could be.

She was not ignorant of the great truths of the Bible, and had memorized many passages in

the course of her preparations for Sunday-school lessons. But she could find no comfort in these garnered passages. Only those that spoke of God's hatred of sin, his wrath against evil-doers, and the terrors of the law, came back to add to her agony of mind.

The long hours of the night wore slowly away, and still wakeful and tortured by a sense of unpardonable sin, Florence tossed upon her pillow. The morning brought no relief, and she locked herself in her room, refusing to see or speak to any one.

The searching work of grace was not yet accomplished. The proud heart had to realize its lost condition before it would surrender.

Mr. Morse had heard of Florence's alarm and called to inquire after her. Mrs. Estabrook told him what a shock it must have been to her nerves, though they had not suspected it at the time, for she had shut herself in her room all day and refused admittance to every one.

Some intuition of the possible cause of her emotion dawned upon Mr. Morse, and he asked if he might have a little conversation with her.

"Gladly, if I can persuade her to see you, Mr. Morse," the mother answered, going up stairs.

Florence's first impulse was to refuse to see

him, but a desire for guidance and help led her to go down to him.

Very unlike the proud, self-possessed young lady that she had always appeared hitherto was the haggard, anxious-looking girl who came towards Mr. Morse with the inquiry that so many years ago fell upon the apostle's ears:

"What shall I do to be saved?"

There was no affectation of indifference, no hesitation in the avowal of need, only that longing heart-cry, "What shall I do to be saved?" And as Paul had done, so Mr. Morse tried to do.

He gave the simple gospel message to this young girl who prided herself upon her intellect and culture just as he would have given it to an unlettered, ignorant person: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

For a time his words were without effect. "It cannot be for me," was the piteous answer when he repeated comforting assurances. "I am lost—lost!" was the reply to all the promises of pardon.

"Then it is to you these words are spoken," he urged, longing to send a ray of light into the gloom that surrounded the distressed spirit.

He prayed earnestly for Florence, his whole heart going up in the petitions which embodied her needs; and at last the terrible conflict which

had almost exhausted both mind and body was over, and peace came to comfort the aching heart. Just in proportion to her deep conviction of sin was pardon precious, and she loved much because she realized that she was forgiven much.

It was joyful news that Mr. Morse carried to his waiting wife that night. And there was "joy in the presence of the angels of God" over another penitent sinner who had returned to the Father's love and forgiveness.

The next morning Florence went to seek her long-estranged friend, hardly daring to hope for forgiveness after her many rebuffs, yet trusting to the loving heart that she had at last learned to appreciate.

"Nina, darling, will you forgive me? I was terribly wrong, but I know now the preciousness of the hope you would not give up."

And Nina with a cry of joy rushed into the outstretched arms and clung lovingly to her friend.

They went together to seek Mrs. Morse, and there too all wrongs had already been forgiven, and only love awaited the penitent one.

All saved now; not one in the little class that had not been reconciled to their Father. A joyful communion it was when they met together around the table of their Father's love and par-

took of the emblems of the Saviour's death and sacrifice.

The whole class for Jesus! A tie of love that could never be broken bound scholars and teacher together; and as Mrs. Morse realized that her girls were one in their love for their Saviour and their desire to work for him her heart sang a glad hymn of thanksgiving. Truly the Master had blessed her labors and let her garner a plenteous harvest for him.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00020707495